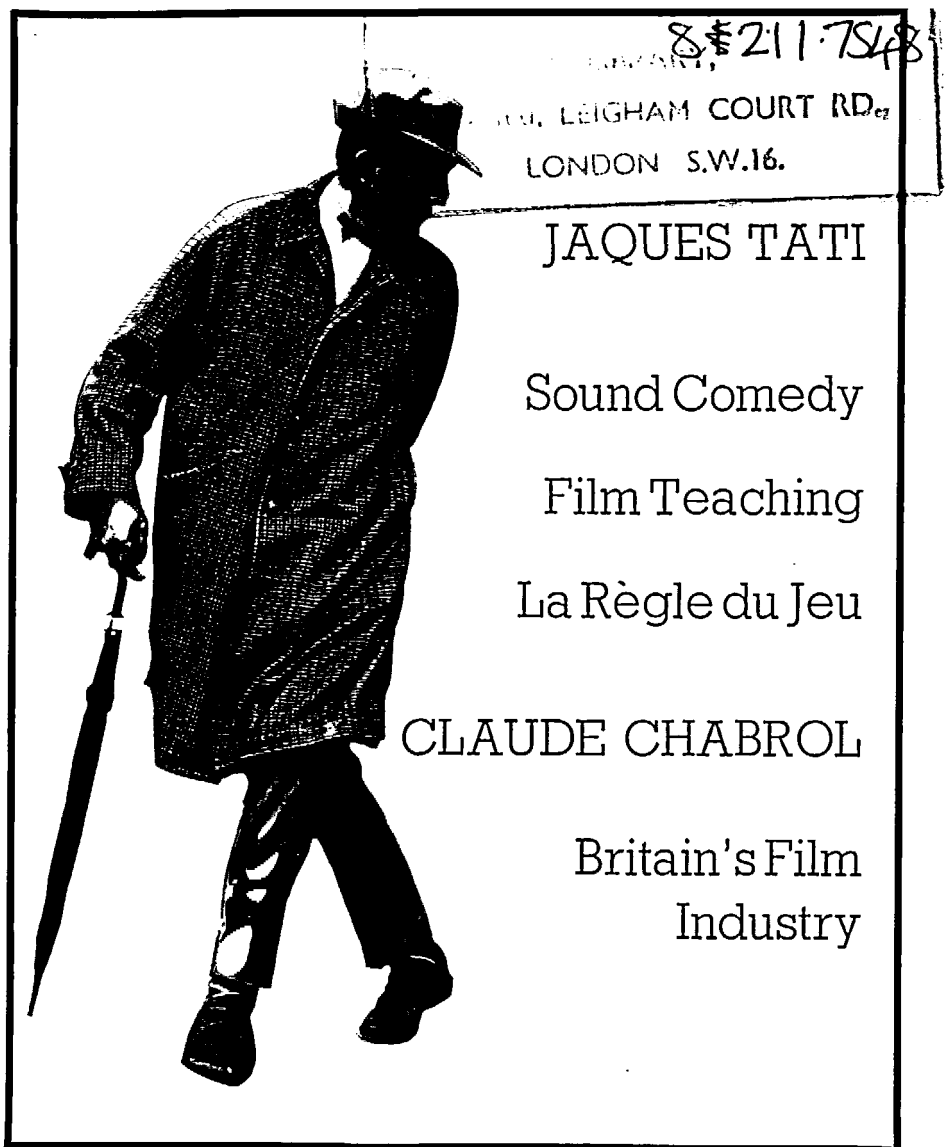


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FOREWORD

The Seminar discussion which is transcribed from a tape recording at the 1969 SEFT Summer School looks at some of the ways in which film is taught in Great Britain. A number of questions about teaching were raised which deserve further examination. Jim Cook who was one of the speakers in the discussion is contacting a number of teachers and we will be publishing some of his findings in a later issue.

There remains a shortage of articles which discuss the problems of teaching film and the editors would be pleased to hear from readers who have a contribution to offer in this area.

Although we were promised a reply from Peter Wollen to the articles by Roy Armes and Andrew McTaggart, we regret that it has not arrived as we go to press.

The series of articles and interviews on British Cinema continues with *The Structure of the British Film Industry* by Vicki Eves. We are printing a major article by Suzanne Budgen on *La Règle du Jeu*, which we hope is the first of a series related to specific films.

Articles and reviews represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Editors

La Règle du Jeu

SUZANNE BUDGEN

La Règle du Jeu (1939) derives from a strong theatrical tradition. Parallel developments above and below stairs are a staple of traditional French comedy, and the character of Lisette is the traditional *soubrette* or *suivante*, the loyal confidant of her mistress, pert, witty, and resilient, and holding her own on terms of near-equality with her mistress's friends.

In the basic conception of the film, and in the nature of the dialogue, there is something of Marivaux. His best-known play, *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard*, may well have suggested the title, and the element of disguise, with its attendant confusions, is essential both to the play and the film. The character of Schumacher owes much to Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, not only in his actual personality and outlook, but in the effect of his rigidity on other people. Molière's Alceste is presented with great sympathy but not at all uncritically. His stern moralist's approach is seen as wholly individual, as a form of vanity and almost of selfishness, and his love, like Schumacher's, fails to take account of the character and personality of the woman who is its object, and is indeed directed less at her than at his own idealized and self-flattering conception of her.

But the real, direct, source of *La Règle du Jeu* is *Les Caprices de Marianne*, by Alfred de Musset. From this, Renoir took the character of Octave almost entire, and part of his plot, including the substitution which causes the death of André and Octave's disappearance. Musset's contribution to the theatre is a comedy of feeling with all the wit, verve, and elegance of a comedy of manners, and his most remarkable play, *On ne Badine pas avec l'Amour*, is a comedy which ends tragically and yet remains a homogeneous work. *Les Caprices de Marianne* has the same mingling of comedy and tragedy. (Written with more than a nod to *Twelfth Night*, it includes a specific evocation of Malvolio; the character of Malvolio, grafted on to that of Alceste, is a fair summing-up of Schumacher.)

The intrigues of play and film are exactly parallel, but in the film the final disaster is brought about by the Marivaux element of disguise. Christine, as she goes off with Octave, allows Lisette to put her, Lisette's, cloak round her shoulders and later Octave pulls the hood up over her head; Octave, sending André to Christine, puts his own coat over André's shoulders, and together these two disguises cause André's death. It is part of

the irony of the film that it is Octave himself who makes the killing of André inevitable. By putting up the hood he ensures that neither Schumacher nor Marceau will recognise Christine, and by concealing the identity of André he prevents the watchers from having any doubt as to what is afoot.

In *Marianne*, Octave is a figure of some contempt. He spends his time in drinking and moderate wenching, and cannot at first, really understand that Coelio is serious when he says, '*l'amour, dont vous autres faites un passe-temps, trouble ma vie entière*'. (Love, which to the rest of you is just a pastime, disturbs my whole life.) Octave comes to feel love only through pleading for Coelio, and realises that he has not in himself the power to be an independent principal in a love affair.

All this has its place in the film. Throughout, Octave treats Christine with the affectionate familiarity of a childhood friend; it is only at the end, when, after seeing her with Saint-Aubin, he hears her first confess her love for André and then begin to doubt her own feelings, that it suddenly comes to him that he too is in love with her, just as the others are.

There is a fatalism in Musset's Octave which must have appealed to Renoir. It is translated in the film-Octave as a hesitancy of approach and indecision of movement, as if he had the power of motion only, without the will to choose a course nor the drive to hold to it. There is a kind of bumbling bonhomie about him, a genial clumsiness, which masks his real feelings, and which is given visual expression in the bear-skin, which he wears as fancy dress, and which he cannot take off without help.

Coelio and Octave (*Marianne*) reflect a duality in Musset as André and Octave (*Règle*) reflect a duality in Renoir. From at least as early as *Bondu Sauvé des Eaux* (1932) there is to be seen a priapic, pagan, quality in Renoir which finds expression only occasionally but which persists at least as late as *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (1959). Side by side with this, there is in Jean Renoir, as there was in his father, a feeling for the essential purity of sexual desire. In *La Règle du Jeu* he does not represent either of these in its clearest form, but as they are modified by the conventions which hold society together. Apart from character and situation, Musset contributes to the film its tone, which is, as so often in Musset, that of comedy bearing in itself the ingredients of disaster. Musset's are not sentimental comedies, in the normally accepted sense of the term, but comedies of sentiment, where the badinage is the expression of true feeling, and where it happens that words spoken lightly may be seriously received, and vice versa. There is a sense of something explosive lying under the surface which, if all goes well, will be resolved and lead to a happy ending, but which may, if any one thing gets out of balance, as easily lead to disaster. It is because Musset's dialogue, however witty and elegant, never ceases to be the channel of true feeling, that the two elements of comedy and tragedy are both right and can be combined in one play. This is very close to Renoir's own view of life as we see it in his films.



Octave (Jean Renoir) and Christine (Nora Gregor)

La Règle du Jeu embodies this and a great deal more. It is based on the idea of man as a social being, to whom conventions are both irksome and necessary. Polite exchanges will embody our thought only up to a point; in the end the feelings will not be contained within these bounds and it is a matter of chance, or fate, whether the irruption of passion will end well or badly. The social conventions are not free or generous enough to allow for the full extension of a normal feeling person, so that, at any moment, bursts of emotion may occur. Society itself channels these to some extent in occasions of organized license, but not everyone is amenable to the dictates of society, and occasionally passion breaks loose and proves destructive.

The shoot is such an occasion; it is a crucial sequence, and is, in a sense, the key image of the film. It refers back, logically and visually, to Robert's encounter with Marceau and his talk with Schumacher about destroying the rabbits – to Robert, that is, in his authority and power, in contrast with the Paris scenes, in which we principally see him in his weakness. The shoot is also later seen to have prefigured the death of André, shot by the gamekeeper, and falling, as Marceau explicitly reports, like an animal shot in sport. We see very little of André's death, but the man is invested with the pathos of the repeated deaths that we have been shown during the shoot, and especially with a sense of the vulnerability of the last small

creature to be killed, whose death-throes we are shown in all their quivering helplessness.

But the shoot is not just an image of death; visually it is spacious and splendid, with a sense of a particular place, and climate, and season, and, because it takes place in the domain of Schumacher and under his control, it allows full scope to his stern efficiency, while his grim hardness is thrown into relief by the softness of his victims. Schumacher is not an evil man; in many ways he has, like *Alceste* and *Malvolio*, right and reason on his side. But the unyielding narrowness of his character, and disposition to tyrannize, make him unfit for social intercourse and, when his destructiveness goes beyond normal, decent, bounds, he is thrown out. The shoot, with Schumacher in command, completes the exposition of his character, so that all that follows is seen as a natural consequence of it.

The social function of the shoot is shown as providing a context in which civilized people can give vent to a savage cruelty which is normally concealed. The General, who, indoors, is always commenting on the rightness and style of his fellows, here, in the open air, and after a shot of the battlefield strewn with its small corpses, can tell the story of a friend who accidentally shot himself in the leg and died twenty minutes later, and not only roar with laughter himself but set the others laughing as well. But the shoot, though lethal, is organized and disciplined. Once the guns have been given up, Christine and her guests become absorbed in the contemplation of various creatures, starting with a squirrel, carefully observed through field-glasses, whose private life, it is said, now lies open to them. At this point we see Geneviève and Robert in the throes of a final explanation. Geneviève ends by accepting that Robert will leave her, but asks him to kiss her goodbye, with all his old warmth, so that for a few moments she can pretend that all is as it was three years before. It is this last kiss, with its pretence of passion, that Christine sees with the field-glasses, those field-glasses which enable one to spy, unobserved, on the truth. Inevitably she takes the false kiss for sterling and becomes aware of her husband's liaison at the moment when it has ceased to exist. The irony is underlined by the sound of a hunting horn as Christine sees the embrace: the horn is perfectly justified on naturalistic grounds; it has sounded before and is part of a complex of sounds related to the shoot, and yet, coming again at just that moment, it falls on the ear like a clarion-call in Christine's own consciousness and marks the point at which those events are set in train which will end in the death of André.

The arrival of André opens the film; his death virtually closes it. As a record-breaking aviator, he comes down from the sky, and, with the help of radio, he intrudes on Christine and Robert in the privacy of their own rooms. He is the irrational, the random, element, descending into an ordered, if far from ideal, situation, which he disrupts, and which destroys him. He is assisted in his enterprise by Octave who, though a familiar of



Lisette (Paulette Dubost)

all the other characters, and at ease in their world, is nevertheless not civilized as they are, not formal in his address nor ordered in his movements. He alone addresses all the other principals by the familiar 'tu'; his boisterousness with Christine speaks of a world less formally organized than her present one, and his speech has the vigour of popular idiom. (His relations with Christine are important to the character of Christine herself. They remind us that she is a foreigner and a stranger, and, by evoking a milieu more demonstratively affectionate than her present one, they help to explain her subsequent behaviour as she inclines to one man after another, responding to each one's show of affection. They also help to

explain her impatience with André when he refuses to carry her off.) Between them, André and Octave are a threat to order, and the film demonstrates the power of society to destroy anything which threatens it. The conventions are not adequate to contain a full life but they make misfortune bearable and prevent disaster from destroying the social fabric; they do this by being selective and ruthless.

In the early part of the film relations are formal; indeed one of the many pleasures that it affords lies in the elegance of the scenes in the La Chesnays' Paris house and of those in which the house-party at La Colinière is gradually assembled. Renoir puts us in presence of a group of people who speak with the readiness and ease of long acquaintance and who give to the spaces in which they move a sense of habitation and familiarity. Robert himself speaks with the wit and elegance of an educated precision.

In this film Renoir gives us language as an expression of social function (as distinct from position) as well as of temperament. Octave's mumbling, formless and casual, is related to his lack of defined social function, while Robert's easy stylishness is related to his wealth and rank, his pleasures and duties. It is part of his assurance that he can indulge his liking for Marceau, with whom, temperamentally, he is, so to speak, on equal terms, as Marceau himself recognizes, speaking to Robert with the usual forms of respect but with a confiding friendliness which would be temperamentally outside the scope of Schumacher, for instance, or of Corneille, the superbly efficient major-domo.

The freedom of communication which obtains above stairs is not repeated below. Among the servants we see a formal hierarchy which has no equivalent above. Only Marceau, with his openness and freedom, cuts across the barriers of rank to run after Lisette, who, as maid to Madame, is very high in the social scale. Life below stairs is altogether more rigid and less complex; the chef, judging his employers with what at first appears to be an egalitarian freedom, shows by those very judgements the limitations of his station in life. He sees the world wholly in terms of his own profession, condemning one aristocratic family because, he says, they ate like pigs, and upholding the claims of Robert to worldly distinction in terms of the delicacy of his palate. He puts Mme de La Bruyère in her place (though not, of course, to her face) by classing her supposed dietary requirements as a fad, to which, he says, he refuses to pander. (Mme de La Bruyère is, in fact, a vulgar woman, utilitarian and interfering, and the chef's condemnation, firm and confident as it is, establishes at an early stage the sense of a vigorous critical climate in the servants' hall.)

The greater simplicity among the servants extends to the intrigue itself. Christine is established as a foreigner coming from a milieu of artistic, rather than social, distinction, and not bred, therefore, to the same rules as her husband or his friends. With a great and winning simplicity of manner, she is nevertheless not above enlisting the help of her husband's mistress in furthering her own affairs, and, while Robert is caught between his past and Geneviève on the one hand, and Christine and his future on the other, Christine herself moves through a variety of emotions with André, Saint-Aubin, and Octave, as well as keeping up what seems to be at least a warmly civil communication with her husband. In the course of all this, we are made aware of the young Jackie's feelings for André, as well as the exchanges between the rest of the guests, whom we are shown as belonging to a world of complex, finely graded, relationships. The central figure in this is the huge woman addressed by all as 'ma petite Charlotte', whose magnificently solid presence gives the necessary ballast to the swiftly darting movements, both physical and emotional, of the background group of guests.

Among the servants, affairs are more straightforward. We are told at an



Marceau and Schumacher at the close of the film

early stage that Lisette is fonder of her situation with Madame than of her husband, and that she looks on men as fit to be flirted with but not to be befriended. She quickly shows favour to Marceau, and when she comes down to find him by himself she is openly munching an apple (which she does with a deliberate provocativeness of manner), a fruit which, in any Christian-based culture, has an obvious significance. From then on, it is a simple pursuit of Lisette by Marceau, and of Marceau by Schumacher. Between Robert and his women there is also an apple, but upgraded socially by a classical allusion. He says to Geneviève, '*Ma position de berger Paris sans la pomme me semble d'un grotesque*' (My position as the shepherd Paris without the apple is too grotesque) – the apple is there, but only in a verbal, formal, evocation, and the Apple of Discord relates to a more artificial and sophisticated situation than the very basic apple in the Garden of Eden.

But, significantly, it is on the level of amorous intrigue that servants and masters are equated, though they do not actually intermix. In hot pursuit of Marceau, Schumacher disregards the rules which confine him to the corridors of the house, and chases through the halls and drawing-rooms, in among the guests and in and out of the concert room. However, because his idiom is different from theirs, the guests do not recognize what is going on and take his desperate rage as all part of the show. The splendidly mountainous Charlotte, having already unwittingly provided shelter for Marceau, meets Robert's apologies for the untoward liveliness of his staff with the comment, '*Il faut bien que ces gens-là s'amuse**nt comme les autres*'. (These people must enjoy themselves like anyone else.)

She is genial, civilized, and broad-minded, but she has completely failed to understand what it is that has been going on, as in her world the idiom of passion is different. It is, as we learn from her comment on André and Christine, one of subterfuge and innuendo. '*Ils ont,*' (they have) she says, with a shrug which implies that any child could have guessed. It is in line with the remarks of the General. He constantly refers back to a golden age in which standards of social rightness were more firmly maintained, and sounds at intervals throughout the film a note of melancholy (though invariably comic in the way it falls), as of a world that is no longer part of a vigorous social entity. His approval is excited principally by social dexterity. It is plain that everyone knows about André and Christine; some knew already, others heard André's declaration on the radio. Her little speech, openly acknowledging her part in his achievement and presenting it in an unexceptionable light, earns her the General's warmest approval, not on the grounds that it removes any imputation of wrong from her conduct but in that it makes whatever she has been up to socially acceptable. At the end, when Robert explains that André has died through a tragic accident, the General comments that this is a new definition of the word 'accident', and warmly admires Robert's skill in having, on the one hand, got rid of his rival, and, on the other, presented the event in such a light as to avoid embarrassing his friends. Society has triumphed. It has destroyed André, whose coming had threatened to disrupt it by introducing passion into a situation where feelings are supposed to be under control; it has got rid of Octave who, with his undisciplined friendliness, threatened it as certainly as did André; and it has taken the guilt away from André's destruction. The facts have been reorganized into an acceptable fiction and life can be resumed. But, if it is society's triumph, it is also, of course, Robert's. He, whose social standing has been impugned on the grounds of his Jewish blood, and whom André has called a fool, is seen to understand and practise the rules better than anyone; he is now recognized as an ornament of the society which has nourished him.

A large part of the film is taken up with the concert. Fancy dress affords a temporary release from one's own personality and from rigidly precise rules of conduct. It allows one to try out other ways of being and behaving, and there is a generally accepted feeling that exchanges effected when the parties are disguised are no more binding than shipboard acquaintance – in both instances people are isolated from their normal lives. It is not irrelevant to recall that the term 'in disguise' was once current for 'drunk', another state in which normal inhibitions are relaxed and declarations not considered binding. It is significant that Christine should choose to appear in Austrian dress, reverting outwardly to her unattached maiden status, reminding us that she is not French-born and reminding us too of that freer world in which she grew up.

The opening of the concert makes clear the shedding of personality that is involved. Robert and his guests, in their own persons so assured

and easy, are here awkward, confused, and uncertain. Principally, of course, this is a demonstration of their amateurishness and gives the occasion an authentic sense of reality, but dramatically it does show a change of personal style which opens the way to the farcical manoeuvres which follow. These, in their turn, giving rein to feelings which, once out of strict control, cannot readily be brought back into order, bring about Christine's impulsive changes of mood and intention, with their fatal consequences.

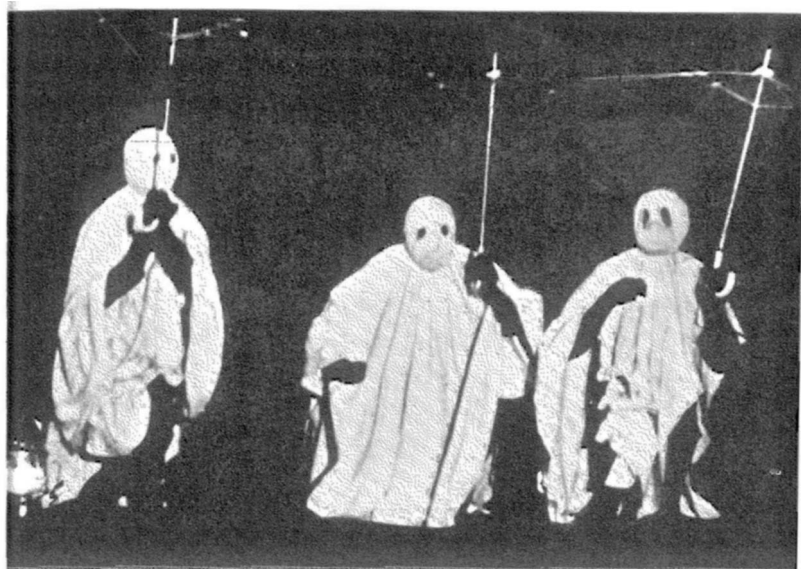
The concert enshrines one of the most persistent images of the film, and this in its final and most elaborate form. From the first scenes in the La Chesnayes' Paris house we are introduced to Robert's musical toys. They are his passion and his pride, and appear repeatedly. The effect of them is partly to introduce a note of baroque fantasy into the urbanity and ordered luxury of Robert's household, but its principal function is to suggest the whole nature of automata, and, without any comparison being overtly drawn, to equate by association the actions and 'voices' of the various figures, governed as they are by rules not of their own making, with the lives of the people around them, they too acting in accordance with rules which they have not designed and which they have no power to alter. The automata also, by contrast, make the formal company seem free and human and natural. This is never made openly clear, and certainly never insisted on, but the constant presence of the figures impresses them on our consciousness as a necessary part of the household and they colour our feelings towards the other members of it.

After the opening chorus the members of the house-party begin to move about and pair off. There follows the dance of the ghosts, in which Death makes his appearance. This is accompanied by St. Saens's *Danse Macabre*, played on the piano, now performing mechanically. Charlotte, who has herself been playing, watches in amazement, and the impression is conveyed of a breach in the familiar orderliness of circumstance.

There follows a sequence of seemingly great confusion (i.e. it represents confusion but is not itself confused) in which the servants begin to move among the guests, leaving their posts on the edge of the audience to chase about in and out of the rooms where half the house-party are similarly engaged, with by now little left of the formality and decorum which had distinguished them before they assumed their disguise. Marceau and Robert are brought together in the course of their respective chases, and compare notes about the difficulty of dealing with the women in their lives. Robert then helps Marceau to escape from Schumacher, who is rushing through the house looking for him with a gun, and, in the course of the long farcical sequence which follows, Christine finally confesses to André that she loves him. She imagines that, true to the heroic role in which she, and society, have cast him, he will take her in his arms and run off with her, and is appalled when he says firmly that he must first have an explanation with her husband. When she protests that they are in love, so

what does anything else matter, he tells her that there are rules. André, come down from the sky, is nevertheless caught by the rules, and his impulse as well as Christine's is checked. At this point we go back to the concert in time for another chorus, and, immediately after, Robert appears, deeply moved, with, as he explains, his masterpiece, the jewel of his collection. The curtains open on a fairground steam-organ, with flashing lights and, below the painting of a woman, three boy figures (Christine and her three men), whose clockwork movements and sweetly insipid faces put before us, this time with great insistence, the semblance of life that the automata represent. Throughout the following sequences, with Schumacher letting off his gun among the guests and André and Robert looking for Christine, who has this time gone off with Octave, the 'masterpiece' intermittently continues to play, offering an image of indifference to human feeling and involvement, and continuing to entertain the audience, to whom all the chasing about appears as part of the show. Finally the 'masterpiece' goes out of control, and the harrowing noise that it makes, contrasted with the bland complacency of the figures, presents a spectacle of discord putting on an appearance of harmony that illustrates the essential nature of the confusion around it. It assaults our senses and establishes for a moment a predominance that annihilates the human scene.

In her first scene Christine says to Lisette, '*Ah! Qu'est-ce qui est naturel de notre temps?*' (Ah! What is natural nowadays?) and near the end, Octave, in answer to Christine's protest that no one had told her of Robert's liaison with Geneviève, says '*On est à une époque où tout le monde ment*'. (Nowadays everybody tells lies). The bulk of the film is, as it were, enclosed in these two phrases and governed by these two concepts. The rules of the game are not rules of conduct, but rules of behaviour; they are concerned with appearances, because to a large extent appearances are all that we can know, and usually the only means by which we can make intelligible signs to one another. When Robert thanks Christine for having saved appearances over André, for not having made him look a fool, he is talking of something vitally important. Renoir's film gives us a picture of society as man organized for survival. He shows us a form of social life which was already disappearing, and the final shot, of the stone balustrade with only the shadows of the guests passing along it, followed by a totally black screen, is a poignant, and indeed, in its narrower implications, a prophetic comment, but it is, too, an image of melancholy commiseration with the human lot. It is a recognition that the most desperate strivings, as well as the keenest pleasures, have an end, and it is, as it were, a salute to the validity of what has gone before, as if, in the face of that end, one way of making life bearable is as decent as another. It suggests that the rules, in creating an order, if an artificial and limiting one, are making possible at least a degree of communication and reciprocal understanding, and a degree of pleasure if not of happiness. And, as we learn from Lisette's injunction to Jackie to be brave, because she is an educated young woman



The danse macabre

and knows how to behave, they also provide a structure of support which, while having no power to alter feelings themselves, nevertheless provide a pattern of behaviour by which one is held, as in a splint, until the feelings become more directly bearable.

The film recognizes the fact that conventions and courtesies make life into an ordered experience which can be compared to a game, together with the recognition that the pieces of the game are people, and that the moves and gambits are a means, often the only means, by which desperate feelings can find expression. It reflects an acceptance of this situation qualified by the need to make the nature of it known.

UZANNE BUDGEN is an Assistant Lecturer in Film at the Slade School of Fine Art.

Approaches to Film Teaching

This seminar discussion took place at the SEFT Summer School, held in August 1969 in Barry, Glamorgan.

The speakers are

Kevin Gough-Yates
Terry Bolas
Jim Cook
Elfreda Symonds
Alan Clayton
Edward Buscombe
Patrick Norman
Anthony Nelson

KGY: There's still discussion going on about the way in which film should really be taught and what kinds of courses can be devised and in what kind of ways. A lot of the early work was done by Jim Kitses with experiments at Kingsway Day College. The courses were constructed around the notion of thematic studies. You took a subject like 'Young People on the Screen', and showed some clips or feature films where young people appear to be involved in an analogous situation to that of the students themselves. You discussed the situation by comparative illustrations, and the subject widened out. At the same time, film was thought to simulate people's environment and teachers were able to ask, 'Do you know anybody like this?' and so on. This is certainly one way of teaching film. There's been some kind of reaction to it, but thematic studies is still hotly defended by certain people. One of the main reactions to this has come from people who have, to a great extent, discovered American cinema and want to talk in terms of genre or in terms of what directors can actually do. And again, there is, simultaneously, another kind of reaction, which is more related to the form and structure. This is what we're going to talk about, but Terry, Jim and myself will speak briefly and then perhaps we can open up to see what others have to say. Terry, would you like to lead off.

TB: I think one of the interesting things which emerges is the way in which each of the approaches that one is suggesting, or which has been put forward, has a kind of place in the evolution of film teaching or screen education, and arises from dissatisfaction with the

previous one. Thematic teaching came in as a reaction against the approach of Film History and Film Grammar where educationalists would assume that in order to teach film, you had to begin by showing Lumiere and work your way through Griffith and Eisenstein, and eventually Orson Welles and Antonioni or Godard. The best way to approach film was in terms of long shot, medium shot, close up, analysing it as though it was mechanically put together or mechanically photographed. It's major importance was that it was the only time at which it has been easy to see the connection between classroom film teaching and practical work because one of the difficulties with all forms of film teaching is what kind of work follows. You have a discussion, but then what? If you thought in terms of Film Grammar or the Historical approach, you went out and made a film. There was no question of there not being a logical way of merging the two. You talked in terms of long shot, medium shot, and close up, and the children filmed in the same way.

The Thematic Approach was a reaction, where the film's content was emphasized. War, Youth, The Family, provided the standard by which extracts were selected. These always provided a good basis for discussion, but it created a problem about follow-up-work, that is, how you went on from showing the film to talking about it, whether that was all you needed to do, or whether other considerations came in; the film teacher had to feel that he had an end product other than the discussion. Its great advantage was that it fitted more easily into a school curriculum than the previous approach of film grammar, film history, and film making. Thematic studies emerged in secondary education, especially with English teachers, and in Further Education especially in Liberal Studies though its uses varied considerably from school to school and teacher to teacher. The use of the thematic studies in English is the classical way it can be used for discussion. But it can also form a basis for subsequent writing, using the film, or rather its theme, as a stimulus. Of course there is clearly a danger that you are presenting film material as though it were quite unarguable evidence and had no element of construction. In Liberal Studies, there has been more flexibility using comparative extracts on the same subject dealing, say, with War, or Young People. Here it emerges that the statements that are made in a film vary according to the way that it's made and the person that's making it.

The Thematic Approach is particularly important as far as teachers are concerned, for it has now been more or less given the stamp of official approval through the Humanities Curriculum Project where the use of film extracts is part of an integrated attempt to go over the boundaries of the various social subjects in education, like Geography, History, English, R.I., and so on, and where the subject of film that shows war becomes the basis for a work in a whole series of subjects.

The use of film extracts has a great appeal in the way in which it can provide a common basis of experience for children working on a project like war, more so than if you used English literature. Here film is very much part of a wider process of teaching. The danger here is the one which perhaps emerges with thematic studies that you reach a point where you have to use an extract from a film to which you yourself are not particularly sympathetic and do not think a particularly good example of film, but which in terms of content illustrates a particular social point that you want to consider. We all know the difficulties concerned in obtaining extracts and getting enough of them. The fact that the Humanities Curriculum Project will be selecting extracts, which will be chosen on a thematic social basis is going to influence the supply of extracts and the kind of extracts that are available for use, and so teachers whose approach is different will find that the material is perhaps tending to go against the way that they would want to teach.

JC: Terry told us that the thematic work tended to fall to English teachers. When English teachers being, in general, rather unclubbable and contentious, found that some of their members were teaching thematically they asked 'What about the film?' They thought, we're flogging away at O-level lit., at A-level lit., at texts, at increasing discrimination, increasing perception, why can't we do it with film. Why can't we *examine* film, rather than rake through it for social ideas and social comment.

There are various ways in which one can approach this sort of film teaching; as an academic parallel to literary criticism, one can take the individual film as one takes an individual text. One can take certain styles, certain types of film. People on this course last year went through the whole of Arthur Penn's work, for example. One could look at each one of his films, starting with *The Left-Handed Gun*, which was a film about Billy the Kid, through to *Bonnie and Clyde*, first of all as individual films – one could decide what the characters' motivations were, what the themes were, how we arrived at statements like, he acts in such-and-such a way, what evidence we had. Does he say he's going to act in such-and-such a way? Do we see it on the screen? How do we, if you like, read the film? We can take these as individual films, and then look through the set and see perhaps a continuity or a break in the continuity. I think it's pretty obvious to the people who know Penn's films, that *Mickey One* stands in some ways outside the general range of Penn's concern. One can do this with short films made by one director. Franju, made films that at first sight seem varied, commissioned documentaries, *Hotel des Invalides*, about the war museum, *Le Sang des Bêtes*, about a slaughterhouse in Paris, a film about Georges Méliés, a pioneer of the cinema, but all of which can be seen to have a certain continuity of thematic

concern, certain ideas running through them and a certain similarity in the way of expression. It's very different from the thematic approach.

Another strain of this approach is to look again with the idea of some sort of cohesion, cohesion within the work, cohesion within several works by the same director, a cohesion within a national cinema, some of the things we've talked about for example this week in Polish cinema, certain themes which come up again in the role of women, the importance of the war, the romanticism, the surreal, one sees these developing quite apart from the examining of individual texts. One looks first of all at the individual films, then at more films, seeing certain linkups. Similarly I think one could take something like the Italian Cinema, starting in '45 with the Neo-realist movement and follow the move to more personal cinema with Fellini and Antonioni. One should be able to relate them to a more politically committed cinema, Pasolini, Bertolucci and so on.

American cinema could be treated in this way. The genre films seem to have certain repetitive elements. One could look at these almost as a sociological study of the films. With gangster films, for example, one can see America coming to terms with it's own urban environment. One can see a continuity in a movement or genre, emerging, from analysing the individual film.

If I had to sum up the values of this approach, it is that it has a cohesion which comes from within the material itself. The cohesion is not grafted on, either by chronology of history or by thematic concerns like War, Young Love. There is stylistic cohesion, because it comes from one nationality or from one director. It can lead children, young people, whoever's studying the film to increase their perception *vis à vis* this medium which is radically different from any other.

KGY: First there's the verbal problem of what one means by theme. *A Kind of Loving*, *Zero de Conduite* and *Il Posto* can be used as illustrating the theme Young People, but *Zero de Conduite* can be said to have a different theme from *A Kind of Loving*. I can never understand why these things were grouped together in this kind of way. War on the Screen, is another good example, where the actual framework of the war seems a device to examine something totally unrelated to war. A good example is *Paths of Glory* which has little to do with war. It's certainly something to do with class and it's something to do with power, but very little to do with war at all.

Secondly, a film course that omits certain directors in favour of a certain kind of cohesion is a bad one. I would argue against Genre Studies because I think it has no real stylistic cohesion. I think it is valuable, but it is a closed area.

All films for instance, have a pattern, and this is fairly important. Now if I can give you a very simple example: There's a sequence in *Foreign Correspondent*, a Hitchcock film which is directly taken from the Odessa steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*, there's the fact that Hitchcock based *Rear Window* on the experiments of Kuleshev. Now you may think this is of quite marginal importance, the whole notion of cutting from face to object and back to face and back to other objects and so on. But it is something that Hitchcock knew about, and knew what he was doing. There's the Peckinpah film, much lauded by people, which has been influenced by a Boetticher film, and it seems to me that these two stand in a kind of set. They're a pair. You've got the role that is genre, of course, of films with family resemblances, *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* for example. But you've got other relationships – like between Sam Fuller and Godard. Their films appear different, what appears on the screen is different, but Fuller has influenced Godard in one kind of way. And it seems to me to be quite a valuable way of actually teaching. Jim has said elsewhere that I believe in a course with no structure at all, but I don't think that's really quite fair. I would have thought, for instance, that the connection between Godard and Bresson was worth exploring in the sense that *Vivre sa Vie* is clearly modelled on Bresson. This is the kind of thing I am thinking of. At one level it's a solid area; you can look for stylistic connections between films which appear to be in different contexts. Stylistic connections are not necessarily to be found in national contexts. They shoot right across countries and generations. There is great value in being able to put *Potemkin* in the same lecture as you put a Hitchcock film. Other people may not agree.

I have sketched out one or two other ideas which are hierarchically less and less valuable. It wouldn't be a bad idea to have a course based purely on the 'camera style', the notion of actually writing on the screen, writing your films in the way that Godard does. There's an Astruc essay which is translated in the New Wave book edited by Peter Graham where he says that now we are able to write on the screen, the days of the story film are over, we can just say what we want in essay form. Again you've got Eisenstein, Godard, Skolimovsky, Rossen, and I would say, Wajda and Preston Sturges. They can happily come into that kind of category if you want to work within this kind of framework. I like the idea because at one level you are working purely laterally, but when you come to each of these things you can work vertically as well, and you can talk about the director and the way he works and uses the same kind of imagery. Take a trivial example: the notion of the use of the sun in films. You never see a film which is about the lust for gold without the sun burning through somewhere up there in the sky, and those of you

that had the unhappy experience of seeing *McKenna's Gold* will know that it does in fact burn away in the sky. That's not a new idea on J. Lee Thompson's part, it can be found in *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* and goes right back to *Greed*. Probably there are a lot of other films I haven't seen which have the same kind of usage

ES: It does go back to the thematic approach again, doesn't it?

KGY: Not in the way 'thematic' is conventionally used, because the sun also emerges in *2001*. It's not thematic because you're not talking about subject at all, you're talking about the way the image itself or the notion itself is used within the certain kind of area. Take 'light'; in Expressionist films, it's a very common image to find someone with a torch or lamp, which wobbles from side to side and the only illuminated area is straight in front of it. Now this runs right through to films which people don't normally think of as Expressionist, like the Arthur Penn films. Those of you who were here last year know that one of the things that runs through them is the way in which he does talk about and uses 'the light'. These things provide patterns. They're not thematic in the classical sense of the word, as Terry is using it, in which what is *said* in the film is the theme. I'm interested in patterns, rhythms and pointers, and the value of working in this kind of way is that you are not restricted by nationalities and so-called genres. You can talk about Orson Welles in the same area in which you can talk about some of the German Expressionist cinema. I don't think this is done very widely, but that's the kind of area which I would approve of, because it is first and foremost about art.

ES: I think you're doing the same thing. If you're going to talk about light, this is still the grammar, only taken on a little further than before. I think people have got terrified over the word 'thematic'. They think it must be a social theme, but if you take the 'sun' or 'light', this is the theme. If you take a director's work, over several films, you know what it is the man is doing. I think Kevin is just playing with words.

AC: I don't think it really is thematic, but it's similar to my going along to my sixth form and saying, 'Here's the complete works of Shakespeare; we're going to look at all those plays in which Shakespeare builds up a correlation between love and madness.' It's not a thing I would dream of doing because I can't really see the value of it, and it seems to me quite significant that Kevin justified this idea in the terms of the absence of restriction. You can move from genre to genre easily, but it doesn't seem to me to be enough of a justification.

KGY: I would like to see someone like Elfreda devise a course where you can introduce Von Sternberg, or any of the people you normally think of as great stylists in the cinema, using what she would call a 'thematic approach'. I think she's confusing the uses of the word.

ES: Yes, but they're different aspects. They're different ways of tackling it. There is a parallel going through. There is a central core and a central idea.

JC: Thematic studies doesn't, at least traditionally didn't, primarily concern itself with any sort of appreciation a student might have of the piece of film he was looking at. He wouldn't really be too concerned whether a *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* extract was good or bad, whether Albert Finney was playing the role well, how he had got into that situation and why, and so on.

ES: Well, I think those were Kitses's particular ways of using the thematic treatment in film. It's not necessarily the only way, or the best way.

TB: The danger of the thematic approach is that you might forget about the film which you started with and go into some very long discussion which lacks a central focus. You get away from the thing that you started with and go on to certain kinds of social issues using film as stimulus. It's perfectly valid as long as you know you're not teaching film. You are using it as a sort of visual aid material.

EB: Can I ask two questions? First, it's a question to all three really, do you think your approaches are suitable for all levels, or should I say, all kinds of students? It seems to me they're definitely not. Kevin's would make a very interesting talk for people like us. Secondly, though, you didn't say anything about the relation between your kind of course and practical work.

TB: This is a problem. The attraction of the film grammar approach was that there was a relationship. I'm sure there's a value in practical work, of the kind we do on this course, but whether this has to be linked to a more traditional form of film teaching, of looking at a film and talking about it, I don't know. It seems there's a split where one could well be done by the art department in a school and the other, say, be done by the English department.

AC: I was thinking on similar lines. One is teaching what is, to a certain extent, a visual art that has been neglected in schools. Other visual arts are dealt with practically, whether it's photography or pottery and it seems to me that any scheme, and I think it has to be a pretty broad scheme, for film teaching, must make practical work on the part of children and students the main core of it. The same sort of argument has gone on *vis a vis* the teaching of art in schools, but in this case the people who won hands down, and I suspect justifiably so, were the people who argued that art criticism, while perhaps necessary in the art room should be less important in the total scheme.

KGY: There doesn't have to be a connection between critical work and practical work does there? It doesn't exist in English does it? Because

you analyse novels, you don't have all the children going around writing them. They may write short stories and essays, but that's declining.

AC: On the other hand, some people may worry about this. Some English teachers do, I believe, suspect this emphasis on criticism at the expense of creative activity.

• KGY: But that indicates that it's a different kind of subject.

TB: The existence of drama departments in schools independent of English is significant. Maybe there's an analogy here with our film teacher.

KGY: Can I return to an earlier point! When Elfreda says that really you're just talking about a different set of themes, that's not quite true. If you take the type of theme like those that emerge from a director's work, it is different from the kind of things that have been traditionally treated as thematic studies, and it is again different from the set of films that use real names and real locations and examine them to see what qualities it gave to the film. Billy Wilder does this. He uses real locations, real people but also Richard Brooks has done it. In *In Cold Blood*, he uses some of the people that were around at the time of the murder. It adds a peculiar element to the film. Surely this is different in kind to the kind of thing that is normally done. There is some value in studying it, surely there's as much as in the classical approach.

In contrast *The Longest Day*, doesn't fit here, though it might have done. It fits elsewhere. It's got certain things which point right back to the *Birth of a Nation*. There are dates which keep coming up on the screen with times on them, and people posing in position. These are always eminent people like Eisenhower and Wavel, and, as they are established, the date moves away from the screen. It's in *Birth of a Nation* as well, and it's obviously got a stylistic function. But again it's used in another kind of film, it's used in *Psycho*. *Psycho*, is interesting; it begins with a date and time, and yet in the novel from which it presumably comes, they are not featured.

JC: But Kevin, when you've notched up all these links and associations, where do you go from there?

KGY: Well, you can talk about the way that they have been used. It's not just a link in the lateral sense. It's the way that Orson Welles is linked with all the German directors, for instance. But I'd point out that you don't ask that question about music, except within a theoretical framework.

AC: People talk about studying English at secondary school, rather than English Literature, even when they're in the sixth form, and the

term English Literature is normally not used until people go on to Higher Education. In the enlightened lower school, the emphasis is usually on creative work and upon the thematic use of English literature. Then you get into the situation where examination requirements begin to be felt, and you start on the process of detailed examination of certain works. What is not done is the linking of specific works with any tradition or historic process, even the A-level student who's studying, say, a couple of Shakespeare plays will only be given a very general background of anything else that Shakespeare did. I don't really think this is because of the examination system. If the examination system was abolished, I think teachers would turn more towards creative work and more towards thematic work. Now, the term Film Study tends to be used very loosely. Film is used as an adjunct of literature. It does what literature can do, just as well, but it tends to give a bit of variation and if one enjoys film, go ahead use film, there's no loss, and there may even be a little gain, but I'm not really sure whether this is film study. It's something more like Human Studies, General Arts studies, if you like, it's part of the humanizing process. My own feeling is that what I would call film study is the detailed investigation of specific films and the history of style. I don't think it's got a place in secondary education. It's place is in further education, just as the detailed examination of Shakespeare's works, all of Shakespeare's works, has its place in Further Education and not Secondary Education. The school child can't spare the time.

TB: Yes, I think it's important to relate film study to our educational priorities. Film teaching is often a sort of psychotherapy for backward classes. This has been one of the handicaps of getting it accepted on a wider basis. It has been a very easy option for teaching difficult classes, for there's a more immediate response to films. You are using it in an educational way, because you've got other socializing aims rather than aims about cinema awareness.

JC: If you accept that at least some people are ready to spend a year looking at *Hamlet* or *Othello* as a part of an A-level course, is there any reason why they shouldn't be ready to spend a year looking at five films of Arthur Penn, or Godard or John Ford?

ES: I think that question of level is very important indeed, I don't know whether Kevin has ever tried to use Bergman, Godard, Bresson with secondary modern, fourth year leavers?

KGy: Examples needn't be in a foreign language. I've learnt not to patronize. Students have taught me more, in terms of tone and qualities in film than I knew. They opened up avenues in teaching because they respond. It was a relief for many of them to get away from talking about the working classes in British cinema. Students can suddenly say things like, of course it's dark in that part, isn't it,

for certain kinds of reasons. Every course has got a structure, the mere fact that you chose to study material in a certain order, to present one piece in front of another reveals its structure. I'm not going to choose something that doesn't lead into something quite deliberately. I can start with an extract like *A Kind of Loving*, and not allow any question dealing with the relationship of the people to arise in the discussion, and I can try to talk about it stylistically, and at the end I would get them to say why it was a bad bit of film making. I would show an extract from *Il Posto*, and make some comparison with that, which in some ways is similar, but much better considered. There are certain points that can be brought out which tend to be omitted in the general thematic approach. *Il Posto* for example, looks as if it were shot quite casually in the street, but the form of it is very carefully controlled and the use of sound and so on, and these are the kind of things I try to encourage to emerge. I would try to discourage people from asking things like, was he a nice sort of bloke, or, exactly how do *you* pick up girls. I would be quite prepared to move in and show a Godard piece. In fact I've done this, and have met with a certain success because many students were quite bowled over by it and wanted to examine it for style.

AC: Could I say that perhaps a false impression of film teaching may be given by the use of these three or four separate techniques. In fact what happens in a number of places is that the teacher will agree with every single one of you. If I go into a class and decide to give a few lessons using Medieval literature, I don't go to emblematic literature and start collecting emblems in front of the kids, I choose that piece of work which I think is going to help most in what I think goes on in school, which is the humanizing process. That is what school teaching is all about – the humanizing process, it's a very vague term, mind you.

TB: It is easier, and often seems more relevant, for the teacher to use the 'classical' thematic approach.

Maybe, in practice, we've got to see the stylistic approach as an ultimate objective. Maybe we have to come to terms with something less than that, given the realities of the situation.

AC: The thematic approach can be used very well, but it can also be used extremely badly. But, I think the main trouble is it is used extremely badly simply because most teachers lack the experience and the knowledge to use it otherwise. There is nothing wrong with the method, it's something that's wrong with the teacher.

I think this question of film background is the crux of the whole matter. One could imagine the situation where school children were being put onto film and were discussing films from, say, 11 onwards, or even earlier, as a natural part of their education, with several lessons a week involving film and discussion. One can see that by the time

they were 16 they would have moved up the scale so much that a study of style would be fully applicable, but in the present situation this isn't the case. They haven't got this experience really.

KGY: Teachers also need an education in film and there is now a big break-through. There are a number of colleges of education which are teaching film, and where there is a possibility of taking film as a main subject. The places where this began were on the one term courses at Bede and Hornsey. A lot of it is going to be taken away from them, in my view quite rightly. It's going to go where it should be, into the teacher training situation. People, are majoring, if I may use that word, at Bulmershe for instance, in film – marvellous! – and they're also in a teacher training environment all the time.

TB: I think it's a mistake to think there's suddenly going to be created for them a whole series of film teaching jobs.

KGY: But people make their jobs.

TB: There is certainly an instance of a school in East London which had originally done some film work and the people responsible had left, but the deputy headmaster had seen its value. He was subsequently appointed as head of a new comprehensive school, and consequently set up a department of media studies on a grade C Head of Department allowance. Perhaps a tradition will grow where the next generation of educational administrators will be aware of the importance of film teaching and plan curricula accordingly.

AC: The atmosphere in the London area is very different from the atmosphere outside in the rest of the country. I can't help feeling that people in London are a little starry-eyed when it comes to the school situation. It's much easier, I think, for teachers in London because they can get in the viewing experience in order to get the kind of connection that Kevin is talking about. You have to pay very little in the way of transport costs because distribution libraries are based in London. Transport costs can boost the cost of the film tremendously in terms of the limited budget that one has.

KGY: Could I ask a question? Could those of you who are actually in film teaching, tell us how you actually got to teach it.

EB: I was given the job as part of teaching English to students who were on a course known as Business Studies. The girls were doing typing, the boys were doing book-keeping, accounting, commerce, this sort of thing. I was supposed to teach them English and the idea was at the end of the year they might take A-level English. I didn't want to spend five periods a week teaching them A-level English, and asked if I could use some films. The principal said, yes, and I said: 'can I have some money,' and he said: 'yes, all right, and that was the last I

heard from him. It was done by a sleight of hand. It was supposed to be English.

TB: Anybody in a school?

PN: I've got a headmaster who's on the East Anglian board for C.S.E. A colleague who runs Liberal Studies obviously said: 'Pat Norman's the biggest bore in the staff room, he's always on about blasted films, let's make use of him,' and the headmaster must have said: 'Does anybody else show any interest?' and my friend must have said: 'nobody else knows a hoot about films.' You have to get him to sign a chit at the beginning of each financial year to say: 'Yes, I will allow £50 a year for film hire.' I teach an awkward 4th year and a very thinking 6th year.

AC: The school that I am involved with, is a very large school, 2,000, it prides itself on being liberal, and the total amount of money for the whole of visual aids in the school, that's not just films, it is visual aids and everything, is £10.

AN: It's been approached rather from the other end in my school, in that I teach in a girls school, and they have two afternoons a week (what they call choice periods) which they can spend doing more or less what they like. They can go skating, they can go swimming, they can play games. The headmistress wanted film-making as one of these activities, as she felt that this was a leisure pursuit to which the girls should be introduced. I got more or less co-opted as I was the only one who showed any enthusiasm for the idea. This has been going on for some time now but I tend to get merely the girls who wish to avoid physical activity. They feel that film making is something which avoids having to rush round the playing field at high speed. I have now, for the first time, two periods a week for the 4th year, all of the 4th year in two halves. I can actually show films, up to now I haven't shown any as a regular thing. But I am very lucky as far as money goes. I get £150 a year for film materials and £100 a year, to hire films.

AC: The revolution that you were talking about in teacher training has already got under way. It's the education authorities that need a revolution.

KGY: Is there a role that the Society could play here? In what way do you think the Society could help?

AC: There may be a case for a clearly stated pamphlet on what benefits we think the use of film gives to schools. Newsom doesn't devote all that time to it, I think it runs to about three long paragraphs.

TB: Yes, but then one could have made that kind of approach. A lot of people did. What we try to do, is locate the sympathetic members of

the inspectorate in various counties. In some counties you may find that it's a Visual Aids Inspector who's sympathetic, this is certainly the case in inner London. You may find it's the Drama Inspector, which is the case in Hertfordshire, or you may find it's the English Inspector. It's a tremendously difficult job finding out who is sympathetic. Somebody sets up a conference somewhere and invites SEFT along and that's the beginning of it. It's really up to the teachers in a particular area to propagandize and get a conference set up. Then it can be serviced.

JC: The Society does help to organize viewing sessions in certain areas largely as a response to someone writing to Terry, asking about the sort of material that is available. One would take down material, I hope for at least a day, try and build it up on a regular basis, showing the kind of stuff that can be used. People are encouraged to it as a sort of cohesive unit, to keep contact with the SEFT office, but to be their own viewing session organization. We've just had one started up in Birmingham, for instance. There's one working out in Hornchurch in Essex. We try to set up the information, the sort of pamphlets we've got here, and also to give people the opportunity of seeing the sort of films they can use. The important thing is for them to perpetuate the sessions themselves so that the SEFT office doesn't become a gnome controlling the whole thing. Groups all over the country are working at this, with some sort of liaison with the main office. We can normally help cover the cost if an organization wants to set up sessions, and we make bookings with the distributors.

The Golden Age of Sound Comedy

DONALD W. McCAFFREY

The Golden Age of *Sound* Comedy was the thirties. Briefer in span than the time in which the twenties' masterpieces were created, the five or six years in the mid-thirties were a fertile period, and it was a period that ran the gamut of comedy types.

Experiments with sound motion pictures on the eve of the release of *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 indicate that, as in the formative years of silent cinema, the variety act was convenient for the tests. Arthur C. Miller, a cameraman who participated in and observed the growth of the art, recalled seeing short films in Hollywood – a singing trio with Paul Whiteman's band and a George Jessel monologue, a telephone conversation with his mother.¹ These early efforts seem to have been establishing a precedent or a pattern since the formative sound period concentrated on variety films that could be loosely called musical comedies. In many ways, this genre slowed and perverted the development of the sound comedy. Ingrained from its birth was the boy meets girl theme and plot lines centred on show business. The first '100% Talking, Singing, Dancing' musical (as the First National-Vitaphone Pictures ballyhooed its pictures in 1929) was, in reality, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's *The Broadway Melody*. This 1929 work was a backstage story with many of the characters and plot patterns that were repeated in the future. MGM also produced *Hollywood Revue* the same year, with the variety format using Laurel and Hardy, Marie Dressler, and Buster Keaton for skits and production numbers. Many comedians appeared as just 'one of the gang' in star-smothered conglomerations to assure the public the studio had switched to sound. Warner Brothers, the pioneer in sound, with *Don Juan* (the first feature with sound recording in 1926), *The Jazz Singer* (songs and snatches of dialogue in 1927), and *The Lights of New York* (a serious all-talkie feature in 1928), could not be left behind. What was labelled '100% Natural Color' was a Technicolor patented process in its embryonic state. It prompted a *Time* magazine reviewer to complain that the colour had not been 'perfected as well as sound,'² a strong statement for 1929 because objections to poor sound reproduction were vehement.

Sound was frantically being pasted on to a few comic features and many two-reelers. Such curious pieces as the Our Gang two-reeler *Boxing Gloves*, a September 1929 release, displayed sound in the close-ups and

medium shots, with many of the long shots oddly without it, though the spectators were loudly rooting for their favourite boy boxer. Harold Lloyd launched the feature *Welcome Danger* in the same year by reshooting some of his picture and dubbing some of his silent footage. But the attention of the major studios' advertising was on the group-star variety show. Many Broadway comedians with variety show and musical comedy experience invaded Hollywood. For example, the Marx Brothers started their Hollywood careers with the musical *Cocoanuts* in 1929. Few of the silent screen comedians, however, made transition to sound with success. Harry Langdon had already been ushered into the background after three poor features in the late twenties. Buster Keaton was struggling in a system that didn't know what to do with him.

Submerged by the group variety show, *Hollywood Review*, Keaton finally was given a starring role in the musical *Free and Easy* (1930), a ten-reel monstrosity on show business in Hollywood. In the laboured plot, a famous movie star, Larry Mitchell (played woodenly by Robert Montgomery) gets a small town 'boob' a job as a supporting comic in his film. As the character, Keaton supposedly dances and sings his way to success. He was not convincing. However, he revealed himself as an artist who had the drive to try to make the transition in a very direct way – by following the trend to musical comedies, but only proved that he was a fair comic dancer and mediocre singer. His acting was surprisingly poor; he seemed out of his element, and his handling of the lines indicated he was uneasy with sound. He recovered with *Doughboys*, made the same year as *Free and Easy*. By 1933, in *What! No Beer?* It was clear that he would not return to his former stardom. He had many good scenes, but the manic Jimmy Durante stole most of the picture from him. Some of his shorts in the mid-thirties and early forties, bad as most were, reveal vestiges of his past greatness. They were not major financial risks, and he was allowed greater control over his material.

Harold Lloyd and Charles Chaplin had opposite attitudes toward sound pictures. Lloyd jumped into sound with a drive that was similar to the character he portrayed, and he produced at least one sterling picture, *Movie Crazy* (1932), that measured up to the best of the sound age. Chaplin defied the whole trend. He continued until 1936 with silent pictures. *City Lights*, produced in 1931, had only sound effects and music. *Modern Times* (1936) had a few recordings of voice – a radio, television, and the singing of jibberish by Chaplin in a charming song and dance number towards the end of the film. So well did he execute this routine, it is now obvious that he could have created a musical comedy during the transitional period if he had condescended to the craze of the times. But Chaplin held out, and did not produce a sound picture until *The Great Dictator* (1940).

While the star comedians of the silent era were essentially being pushed into a back seat by many new names on the marquees, and by the sheer



Free and Easy

volume of production by other comedians, some actors emerged who fit well into the new medium of sound. By critical standards, Eddie Cantor was a minor comedian, but he, more than many others, found a niche in the musical comedy. *Roman Scandals* (1933), shown today, still maintains its vigour and humour. With a story by George Kaufman and Robert Sherwood, adaptation by William McGuire, and direction by Frank Tuttle, Cantor had a vehicle that fitted him well. Even the elaborate production numbers of Busby Berkeley did not torpedo his manic, staccato style of comedy. In other works he was not as fortunate. His stand-up comedy routines from *Kid Millions* in 1934 are stale vaudeville patter. The story limped to a halt with a string of gags that seemed to be rejects from vaudeville or burlesque, a decade before the picture was made. The Marx Brothers, highly successful in stage musicals, entered pictures with their Broadway hit *Cocoanuts* and never fully divorced themselves from this theatrical form. This first vehicle suffered from a lack of adaptation; some scenes seemed to be merely a recording of a second rate touring company. Fortunately, this comedy team moved far enough from the musical comedy influence to make some of the comedy classics of the age.

A Night at the Opera (1937) has proved to be a favourite of the critics,³ but a reviewing of *Duck Soup* (1933) has revealed that director Leo McCarey could turn a madcap Brothers' picture into a clear-cut, nearly unfaltering design, without removing the charm of their delightfully insane comedy. Where musical diversions retard or even stop the action in many of their pictures, this work integrates the music and the vaudeville routines that are standard fare in their films. While *A Day at the Races* (1937) is inferior to either of these works discussed, some sequences are superb – they are filled with a *reductio ad absurdum* that starts with only an exchange of a line or two of dialogue.

Alienated from Hollywood after appearing in ten unsuccessful silent screen features, W. C. Fields returned to Broadway on the eve of the sound revolution to resume his long career as a comedian in variety shows and musicals. After the industry had laboured with the birth of sound, he returned to begin his slow rise to stardom. In 1930, he made a two-reeler called *The Golf Specialist* which was only a photographed golf routine from the stage. Then he appeared in a mediocre feature *Her Majesty Love* in 1931.

The next year, Edward Cline, a director of early two-reelers for Buster Keaton, attempted to blend the old tradition with the new verbal comedy in the full length work *Million Dollar Legs*. Like forcing old wine into a new bottle, the film depicted the wacky system of a foreign country – a favourite subject of the old comedy. Old timers of the silent screen, Hank Mann, Ben Turpin, and Andy Clyde, played minor roles. However, the new breed, Jack Oakie, Hugh Herbert, and Billy Gilbert dominated the comic antics. Even though he had appeared in silent films so did Fields. The film received mixed notices, but it was a noble effort to bring the old tradition into the world of sound. As an affectionate embrace with the past, some viewers found it satisfying. But like the transitional musicals, this work did not focus on one comic figure as was the practice of Chaplin, Lloyd, Keaton, and Langdon.

Mack Sennett claimed to have rescued Fields from his treadmill in Hollywood.⁴ At \$5,000 a week the comedian was given a freer rein than before and could write his own comedies. While such a salary might seem high, any comedian with Broadway star status was apt to receive big money in the age when stage stars were lured to Hollywood. In 1932 and 1933 Fields created for Sennett four two-reelers which were preludes to better future works. Sennett observed that Paramount was so impressed by the success of Fields's work they put him under contract for features.

When he was given the opportunity to control his own pictures as Chaplin, Lloyd, and Keaton had done in their heyday, Fields was at his best. He scripted *It's a Gift* (1934), *The Man on the Flying Trapeze* (1935), and *The Bank Dick* (1940) using the pseudonyms Charles Bogle and Charles Kane Jeeves.



It's a Gift

It's a Gift has now been rated top in Fields's library of classics. A close study and a showing before today's audiences should substantiate this view. Evaluator William Everson ranks it first,⁵ and Douglas McVay calls it his 'finest achievement'.⁶★ Odd as it may seem, critics of the thirties were not impressed by the film, but the historical perspective achieved by the passing of thirty-five years makes it easier to see the comedian's work in a more objective light. While this film has not received as wide a showing as *My Little Chickadee* (1940), *You Can't Cheat an Honest Man* (1939), and *The Bank Dick*, it deserves an audience. Tightly knit in its story line, it reveals some of the most subtle Fieldsian humour and, more than most works of this age, it combines visual and verbal wit.

★ Not so Andrew Sarris who prefers *The Bank Dick* (ed.).

Fields did his best work as a hen-pecked husband, the character he created in *It's a Gift*, *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*, and *The Bank Dick*. But the con-man of many of his other films still lurks under the skin. Most of the humour of these three pictures springs logically from the character, and the story develops smoothly and firmly to an effective conclusion. Certainly, many of his other films have brilliant moments, and when stronger emphasis is on the con-man side of the character, effective verbal humour is produced.

The combination of his best verbal and visual humour can be witnessed in *It's a Gift*. Annoyed by a high-pressure insurance salesman who is looking for a man with the unlikely name of Karl LaFong, Fields's wife bawls him out during the slick talker's one-sided conversation: 'If you and your friend wish to exchange ribald stories, please take it downstairs.' Fields roars with indignation, more to himself than to his wife, 'My friend!' and goes into the house to return with a meat cleaver in his hand. Though he drives the slicker away, he accidentally receives the final humiliation. Exhausted by the ordeal, he drops the meat cleaver on his foot and emits an agonizing whine of pain that could be produced only by the great comedian – not an overstatement as most actors would handle it, but a high pitched, inward cry that is bottled up by his pseudo-dignity.

Fields stands highest of the 30's comedians – a king because of his uniqueness, innovation, and many-faceted comic character. A drunk, braggart, yet a ball of cowardice when cornered, he hated children, mothers, stuffed shirts, and he generally let them know it. But at the core of his character there were the warmth and charm of a Falstaff even though he snarled and muttered insults.

Another comedian, Joe E. Brown, emerged with the coming of sound after a brief bout with silent pictures and became a popular star – although he was seldom considered a success by critics of the time. His first major effort was *Hit of the Show*, a silent made in 1928, but his portrayals demanded sound. As viewed from today's perspective, some of his works of the early and mid-thirties appear to be quality comedies that merit more attention than they have received. More than the Marx Brothers and W. C. Fields, he used many of the comic story conventions of the past, using some of the same basic material, the naïve, eager, young man striving in a world that conspires against him, a character that Lloyd and Keaton employed. Often he developed the character of the small town 'boob' who attempted to become an athletic hero: a baseball pitcher in *Fireman, Save My Child* (1932), *Elmer the Great* (1933), *Alibi Ike* (1935); a track runner in *Local Boy Makes Good* (1931); a swimmer in *You Said a Mouthful* (1932) and an all-around athlete in *The Gladiator* (1938). The portrayal of Elmer in the 1933 baseball picture revealed Brown in top form. Since he created the role on the stage, with a good script by Ring Lardner and George M.

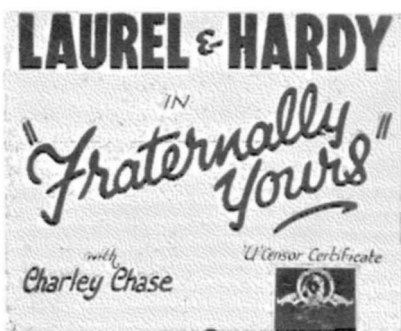


W. C. Fields and Mae West in *My Little Chickadee*

Cohan, more varied facets of a comic character evolved. His autobiography indicated that he observed carefully the personalities of big league baseball players in order to create the role.⁷

While Brown probably was a victim of overproduction and overexposure (many times in the thirties he starred in two films a year), he was able to create a vigorous comedy in 1936, *Earthworm Tractors*. This fast-paced work displayed a portrayal not often associated with the comedian – an aggressive salesman with more guts than sense, a braggart, a con-man. Yet he gave considerable warmth to his role. Seeming to take a cue from his predecessor, Harold Lloyd, he created a type of thrill comedy as he demonstrated a tractor to a potential buyer. He drove up a dynamite loaded mountain, over a crumbling bridge, and down a steep incline. (Naturally, he got the contract and the girl.) On the eve of the switch – when sentimental, family comedies were to glut the market, Brown, assisted by the good direction of Raymond Enright, produced a comedy which blended much of the spirit of the old slapstick tradition with the genteel humour of the small town, just-plain-folks film. Fortunately, enough of the older, livelier tradition surfaced to make a very funny picture.

Brown, it would seem, lacked consistency from work to work because he did not have control and selection of his material. Stan Laurel and Oliver



Hardy suffered a similar fate. Their two-, three-reelers, and features appear to be of mixed quality when evaluated today. Despite weaknesses, this team may be considered second to Fields in the creation of some of the best comedy of the thirties.

Two of their best features are *Sons of the Desert* (1934) and *Blockheads* (1938). *Our Relations* (1936) ranks slightly below these films. Essentially tight works, these three are the team's most consistent in the development of character and situation. Director William Seister and Associate Director Lloyd French probably can share honours with the fine acting of Laurel and Hardy in the success of *Sons of the Desert* (*Fraternally Yours*). The effective blend of visual and verbal humour in this feature gives it a high rating with the critics. The content of *Blockheads* was controlled by Stan Laurel. The writing abilities of James Parrot who directed many Hal Roach two-reelers, and Harry Langdon, helped hew this work into a gem. Many brilliant scenes of bungled efforts and misalliances exist in Laurel and Hardy works. The ability of this comedy team was unique. There are more innuendos created by their skill in playing off each other in a given scene than existed, for example, in the vaudeville chatter of pure gags and nonsense produced by Groucho and Chico Marx. Many times the dumbness of these clown characters makes the humour more primitive – something realized by those who can't abide their type of humour, but that is part of their charm. While it may not make their humour more universal, as Charles Barr contends,⁸ it certainly makes it more basic and links it more



with the older slapstick tradition – a type which seems to live longer than sentimental comedy.

Frank Vreeland, compiling one of those shortlived, best movies of the year books in 1938, noted the decrease in ‘cock-eyed’ and ‘madcap’ comedies and a move to family films which focused on ‘everyday folks.’⁹ He included plot and dialogue excerpts from *Love Finds Andy Hardy*, *That Certain Age*, which are certainly ‘family’ comedies, and *The Young in Heart*, a blend of the sophisticated and the family genres. Most of these works deal in light humour – more often verbal than visual. A discussion between son and father in *Love Finds Andy Hardy* was low keyed and went as follows:

ANDY: Dad, can I talk to you man to man?

JUDGE: That’s the way I always want it to be.

ANDY: Man to man, can a guy be in love with two girls at once?

JUDGE: Both estimable young ladies?

ANDY: Aw, we do a little kissing and hugging. But it’s all good clean fun – you know – like me and Polly.

JUDGE: Object matrimony?

ANDY: Matrimony! Oh, Dad, you don’t have to worry. I’m never going to get married – ever.

JUDGE: That's a momentous decision.

ANDY: Not until I'm middle-aged – twenty-five or twenty-six.

JUDGE: Sound idea.¹⁰

Obviously, this excerpt reveals very light humour. It is typical of the genre; seldom does physical comedy intrude. When it does, it remains subtle and does not become broad enough to evoke more than a chuckle. Like the genteel comedy of the twenties, featuring such comedians as Douglas MacLean, Charles Ray, Wallace Reid, and Johnny Hines (names that are nearly forgotten in movie history), the family comedies that are kin to the Andy Hardy series are tied to the manners of the time. The humour depends upon contemporary references and attitudes of the period. Mild even for its age, the genteel comedy fades with social changes. Time can reduce such humour to a shadow, and an audience today may find it difficult to comprehend why Andy Hardy is so 'up tight' about kissing girls.

Immediately before the box office craze for genteel humour, the sophisticated, so-called 'screwball' comedy flourished. Generally anti-sentimental and sometimes as amoral as Restoration comedy, it may be a film genre that will last. Depending a great deal on the clever line, it is a type with adult romantic entanglements and wacky complications.

Today an audience viewing *Twentieth Century* (1934) receives a rewarding experience. The wit of writers Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur in Charles Bruce Millhalland's *Napoleon of Broadway* has not lost its flavour. Sterling performances by John Barrymore and Carole Lombard also contribute to the film's quality. When Barrymore as the Broadway director-producer, Oscar Jeffe, enters a room with a hastily improvised arm sling to avoid being hit by the present amour of a temperamental actress with whom he had an affair, he explains magnanimously:

OSCAR: I came here out of a gallant mood – to congratulate you.

GEORGE: And you can get right out again! You've no right here.

OSCAR: No right? Doesn't he know about us? [*with an affected, dramatic tone*] I thought everybody knew. It was one of the great romances of our times.

GEORGE: You! [*He threatens – about to strike him.*]

OSCAR: [*Pointing to his arm.*] I broke it in Chicago.¹¹

More farcical than *Twentieth Century*, *Topper* (1937) revealed an aging banker (splendidly enacted by Roland Young) being lured by the spirits of two high-living acquaintances to abandon his stuffy, routine existence and get a little fun out of life. Cary Grant and Constance Bennett were



Love Finds Andy Hardy

marvellous ectoplasmic tempters. *The Ghost Goes West* (1936), directed by René Clair and scripted by the playwright, Robert Sherwood, also featured a visitor from beyond and produced some satirical thrusts at a brash, rich American who brought a castle from Scotland and reconstructed it in the United States.

Other films of this kind, *It Happened One Night* (1934) and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), have traits that may make them classics. The wit of these films cuts into conventional standards deeply enough to be both enjoyable and significant; the flair of the acting, and directing live on. In the forties this type limped into decline.

Some of the best comedy of the thirties seems to have been produced between 1933 and 1938 – about five or six years filled with the superior creations of the age. W. C. Fields's *It's a Gift* might be said to be the crowning achievement of this brief period. The Marx Brothers, Joe E. Brown, and the team of Laurel and Hardy were at the height of their comic powers. This was the age that saw the decline of the musical comedy even though two of the most productive years of this type of film were 1933 and 1934. By this time, the formula musical was being ground out with endless repetitions of the same plot situations and only minor innovation in production numbers to attract the public. Even in its decline of about four years duration, its influence was strong, and elements of the genre often appeared in the standard comic drama – especially the works of the Marx Brothers. A revival of the musical comedy in the late thirties



Cocoanuts

then began to press other forms into the background. The Bob Hope Bing Crosby, and Dorothy Lamour 'road' pictures such as *Road to Singapore* (1939) were to usher in a type of musical comedy typical of the forties.

When sound comedy was evolving into a solid art form in the early thirties, it looked as if the genteel, folksy comedy might develop into an effective type. The 1931 *Min and Bill*, with outstanding portrayals by Marie Dressler and Wallace Beery, had the beginnings of a good light humorous genre. *State Fair* (1933) and *David Harum* (1934) had the acting skills and personality of Will Rogers to create acceptable folksy humour. But the teenagers and moppets (Deanna Durbin, Shirley Temple, Judy Garland, and Micky Rooney) entered with the family comedy and musical. Soon good portrayals seemed impossible. The acting of the children and teenagers was thin and weak. These novice actors could hardly achieve the innuendos of the 'old pros' – the experienced talents playing fathers and mothers had little to work with. Lewis Stone as Judge Hardy could not have made something of his part if he had been able. The writer loaded the script, and he had to play straight man (odd as this may seem for a 'character actor') to a teenage ham, Mickey Rooney. It would be an oversimplification to say that family comedies or revival of the musical comedy brought about the decline of the top comedians. Box office pressure for these comedy types did create an unfavourable climate for the top comedians and could be said to be responsible for elbowing out the 'screwball' or sophisticated comedy. But this is only part of a complica-



The Bank Dick

ted development. The best comedians of the age seemed to have had their say – they had exhausted their material and were beginning to repeat themselves. They were also getting older.

The last films of Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers, Joe E. Brown, and W. C. Fields (made, for the most part, in the forties) are rather pathetic. In their last few pictures they were reduced to the status of ‘bit players’ or old character actors. Only silent screen stars such as Charles Chaplin and Harold Lloyd seemed to escape this final humiliation; they refused to appear in pictures in which they were not given a lead. Fields’s reputation suffered less because his last four films were unpretentious guest spots in World War II variety features – a type loaded with stars. Shades of the film during the transitional silent to sound period, such pictures revealed that the wheel had gone full circle.

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The Structure of the British Film Industry

VICKI EVES

The British cinema industry has been influenced by two major external factors: fluctuations in cinema attendances and the degrees of involvement American film companies have had in the British Industry. During the 1930's and 1940's the cinema was a major source of entertainment. Attendances were on a steady upward trend throughout the period until 1946 when there was a record figure of 1,635 million admissions. They remained just below this level for another four years, until 1950, when they started to decline, sinking to 237 million admissions in 1968.

The strong upward swing in attendance figures after 1939 is usually attributed to the shortage of alternative forms of entertainment, and the general lack of competitive calls on consumers' incomes during the war years. The gradual decline in attendances after 1950, was largely caused by the spread of television to all regions of Britain.

The decline was small at first, because extensive television coverage of all areas of Britain was not complete. Working-class households provided 80 per cent of cinema audiences and television had not yet reached their

TABLE
Cinema Admissions Selected Years
1939 - 1968

<i>Year</i>	<i>Admissions during year (millions)</i>
1939	990
1946	1,635
1950	1,396
1955	1,182
1960	501
1964	343
1968	237

Source: For 1939 and 1946, H. Browning and A. Sorrell, 'Cinemas and Cinema Going in Great Britain', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A (General)* 1954. P. 133 or 1950 and 1955, *Board of Trade Journal*. For 1960 and 1964, *Board of Trade Annual Cinema Tables*. For 1968, *Board of Trade Business Monitor* M 2, Cinema.

homes. Most television viewers, at this time, belonged to the higher-income groups, who were not frequent cinema goers prior to the introduction of television. 1955, however, saw the start of a dramatic expansion of television viewing amongst the working-class, particularly in the multi-income households. This was particularly disastrous for the cinema industry, because working-class households were not only the most cinema-prone by virtue of their class, they were also households that were larger and contained more young people than average (the 15-24 age group constitutes 15 per cent of the population, yet comprises a third of the average cinema audience). It was, therefore, the introduction of television to these families that caused the accelerated decline in cinema attendances between 1955 and 1958. After 1958 the decline was more gradual, because the households acquiring television sets were largely in the older, lower income groups. Other factors, such as shortage of films and the closure of many cinemas, also contributed to the decline in cinema admissions, but these are changes which, though exacerbated by the fall in admissions due to the spread of television, are internal to the industry. It is worth mentioning here, however, that John Spraos estimates that, '75 per cent of an average cinema's admissions are lost to the industry when it closes down', (p. 37)¹ and that although it is difficult to calculate the importance of the conflicting influences affecting cinema-going since 1951, if one does take these other factors into consideration, they reduce the effect of a closure on cinema-going by roughly a third. The best guess for 1960 would therefore be '50 per cent of a cinema's admissions lost to picture-going upon its closure' (p. 38)¹.

The United Kingdom is the American film industry's largest single, foreign market and a successful policy in Britain, added to America's powerful domestic strength, ensures its dominance in the world market. In the distribution field there are, at the moment, five major American companies with their own renting houses in Britain - MGM, Twentieth Century Fox, United Artists, Paramount and Disney. Other companies operate through British distributors - Columbia distributes through BLC (a company owned jointly by Columbia and British Lion), Warner Bros., through Warner-Pathé (owned by Warner Bros. and Associated British Picture Corporation) and Universal, through Rank. In the twenties and thirties America had an 'absolute predominance' (p. 158) ² over the British market. This situation changed with the rise of the major British combines. Nevertheless, British exhibitors have always depended on American films to fill a major part of their programmes. The distribution of American films depends on the state of the American home industry, the production level of the British film industry and the restrictions placed on the import and exhibition of American films in Britain.

In 1947, the year prior to a high import duty on all foreign films, 80 per cent of screen time in British cinemas was occupied by American films; this constituted 25 per cent of Hollywood's earnings (after U.S. tax) (p.

100)². In addition to distribution, America has had an appreciable amount of interest in the production of films in Britain. This has been the case since 1948, when the Anglo-American Film Agreement came into force. This allowed for the remittance, each year, of 17 million dollars of the earnings of American companies in Britain, an amount which could be increased by a sum equivalent to the earnings of British films in the United States (the 'B' pool). American earnings not disposed of in this manner could be used in certain permitted ways (under the supervision of a joint control committee) within the film industry, and also invested outside the film industry (up to £2½ million allowed). At the end of two years, one half of £2 million of the sterling not remitted, whichever figure was the greater, was to be carried forward into the second period. In 1950 the 'B' pool was abolished and any additional amounts over 17 million dollars could be remitted, according to calculations made on the basis of 23 per cent of the amount spent by American Companies on making British quota films (this was increased to 33½ per cent in 1951): 50 per cent of the payments to British companies for distributing their films on a percentage basis in the West: 50 per cent of the payments to British companies for the acquisition of rights within the West other than on a percentage basis. By freezing sterling in this way, there was increased American activity in British film production. During the first two years of the agreement, five of the major American film companies had, together, spent £5,429,779 of frozen sterling on production activities, plus another £204,000 going to their British subsidiaries. Of this total, about £3½ million went on actual production (p. 160).² Recent years have seen an even greater amount of American financed film production in Britain. The Monopolies Commission Report of 1966 suggests that the growth of American financing of British film production can be explained by the following factors,

- (a) Production in Britain is economically attractive to United States film companies both because of the lower production costs and because of the subsidy provided by the British Film Fund Agency.
- (b) The American distributors have greater resources at their disposal than their wholly British counterparts, and are therefore in a position to offer attractive terms and facilities to British producers.
- (c) Financing by one of the American distributors carries the very important advantage that the film will normally have no difficulty in obtaining wide distribution in the lucrative United States market. It would be most unusual for a British film to get this, if no United States company had a prior interest in it.' (P. 73).³

In 1965, two-thirds of the 69 feature films made in Britain were 100 per cent American financed and in 1966, 85 per cent of British film making was financed by America. Lord Willis may well have been right in suggesting that, were the Americans to move out, 'the British film industry would collapse in a month'.⁴

It is within the context of extensive involvement of American finance in British films and a declining public demand for cinema entertainment, that we can now look at the actual structure of the British film industry. The two giants of the film industry have been, since the '40's the two combines Rank and ABPC (the latter having been taken over by EMI in 1969). The position of the Rank Organization was strengthened in 1941, when it gained a controlling interest in the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation and also attained ultimate control of Odeon Theatres Ltd., on the death of Oscar Deutsch. Rank and ABPC, by 1944, controlled in the exhibition field, about one-third of the total seating capacity in the country. Rank controlled 619 cinemas and ABPC had 442 cinemas. The largest distributor in the country was General Film Distributors, a subsidiary of the Rank Organization. In the production field, Rank and ABPC controlled two-thirds of the available studio space, though their actual power was greater than this, since the quality of the equipment and the production capacity of their studios were superior to that of other companies. Rank, for example in the opinion of the Palache Committee (which was set up in 1944, to investigate monopoly in the film industry) controlled studios which represented 'considerably more than half the facilities available'.⁵ The only other organization which could in any way rival the two leading combines, was the British Lion Film Corporation, which was acquired by Sir Alexander Korda in 1946. As a producer-distributor it was second only to Rank, but its weakness was that it had no exhibition interests.

1948 saw the first of a series of changes in Britain's film industry, resulting in a structure that remained virtually unaltered up to 1969. In August 1947, the government, faced with an acute balance of payments problem, cut imports from hard currency areas, imposing a customs duty of 75 per cent on all films imported. The Motion Picture Association of America reacted to the duty by suspending all shipments of films to Britain indefinitely. The film supply situation, which was created by this embargo, was not felt immediately in Britain, as distributors had about 125 unreleased American feature films in Britain at that time. Enough to keep exhibition at a steady level for a few months. The situation, though, was bound to deteriorate unless British production could expand at a fast rate. British producers were faced, for the first time, with an opportunity to dominate their home market, yet the economics of the situation would not allow it. The maximum output possible would have been about 75 first features a year, a figure that fell below half the number of films required. Yet, if production could not expand to fill the gap, cinemas would be forced to run re-issues, leading to a fall in admissions and cinema closures. On the other hand, if production was expanded, cinemas would have films to show and would therefore be saved, but the producers would probably bankrupt themselves, as costs could not be recovered from the British Market alone.

Producers decided to take the risk of radically expanding production. The Rank Group, for example, with its massive chain of cinemas to supply, doubled its production. Their action proved artistically and financially disastrous, because in May 1948, after negotiations with the Motion Picture Association of America, the customs duty was repealed. The increased British output was therefore released simultaneously with the best of nearly two years of American output. The result for Rank was a production loss of £3,350,000 for the second half of 1948 and the first half of 1949. A. J. Rank said of the situation,

‘Unfortunately many of the films we produced were not of a quality to ensure even reasonable returns. It can now be seen that our plans to meet an unexpected and critical situation were too ambitious, that we made demands on the creative talent of the industry that were beyond its resources’. (P. 108)².

Other British producers suffered even more severely than Rank, not because they lost a larger amount of money, but because Rank had numerous exhibiting and electronic manufacturing interests to soften the blow. British Lion, in particular, suffered a loss of £2,187,016, and in order to save the company, the Treasury and the Board of Trade asked for a loan of £3,000,000 from the newly created National Film Finance Corporation. Had the loan not been made, British Lion would have collapsed, resulting in the loss to the British film industry of the major company independent of the two dominating combines Rank and ABPC. Also, to quote Harold Wilson, President of the Board of Trade in 1948.

‘Outside the Rank Organization the greater number of independent producers were associated, directly or indirectly with the British Lion Corporation and that it [i.e. the loan] seemed to us the quickest and surest way of preventing the complete breakdown of production.’ (P. 254).⁶

The setting up of the National Film Finance Corporation in 1949 was a move on the part of government to ensure the maximum output of British films on a long term and ‘sound economic basis’.⁷ The section of the industry which most required help was the independents, who suffered from a lack of working capital. The Rank Group had adequate financial resources and its own studios. ABPC had financial resources but, at the time, comparatively little studio space: this position later changed, with the completion of new studios at Elstree and Teddington. Intervention to help independents was thought necessary, not only because of the contribution they could make to output, but because if no help was given to them, the Rank Group would have a virtual monopoly of film production and this would not, in the view of the Palache Committee and presumably the Government of 1948, be a good thing. The condition of a healthy industry was that ‘independent production remains in being and is

properly safeguarded'.⁵ The difficulty faced by independent producers in getting money from sources other than the government, resulted from the general feeling amongst financiers that film production was not profitable. This caution stemmed, primarily, from the memory of the losses made by the film industry in 1937, after an abortive attempt to enter the world market and also the later, costly failure in 1945 and 1946 of Rank's 'prestige experiment' of putting luxury British films on the American market.

The NFFC had an original capital of £5,000,000 which was eventually increased to £8,000,000. An initial £3,000,000 went to British Lion, part of which has since been recovered as profit on the sale in 1964 of the NFFC's holding in the present company, British Lion Films, and part by way of interest or dividends. In 1969, twenty years after the Corporation was set up, it has lost £3,290,818 on investment in films: this is after deducting the net loss of £1,867,746 incurred on the British Lion loan. One of the main reasons for the NFFC's losses is that they generally provide the 'end money' for a film, the distributor or other sources initially putting up between 50 or 70 per cent of the loan. Thus the NFFC is providing part of the finance for films which are not considered by distributors to be 'runaway successes' – in other words it is helping finance the riskier films. In addition, the Corporation is the last of the backers to be paid back, the distributor

'for the privilege of distributing the film . . . would demand that when the backers were repaid by returns at the box-office, his loan would be repaid first'.⁸

1957 saw two changes which were to affect the film industry. The first, the rationalization of Entertainment tax, had its greatest impact on exhibitors, who were experiencing rapid falls in admissions. The government's move was to make the Exchequer's share of any price increments above elevenpence uniform at 50 per cent. This share was progressively reduced over the next three years, until 1960, when Entertainments tax was abolished altogether. The second change that occurred in 1957 was the passing of the Cinematograph Films Act, which provided for a levy on exhibitors, the proceeds of which were to be used to subsidize the production of British films. In general, the levy is imposed on the gross box-office takings of all films, whilst the subsidy is paid only to British films, the amount depending on the earnings of the film in Great Britain. The greater the success of a British film, the more subsidy it receives. The subsidy is administered by the British Film Fund Agency, which in recent years, has paid out about 40 per cent or more on the earnings of most British films, though a few have been paid back at a rate of 55 per cent.

In 1959 the Rank Organization, suffering losses and low profits from some of its cinemas (resulting in a general depression of rates of film hire for all cinemas in its circuits) decided to reorganize its Gaumont and Odeon circuits into a single circuit made up of its most economic cinemas. It was

left with a Rank Circuit of 286 cinemas and a balance of 126 cinemas which were contributed to a third release, the 'National Circuit'. Lord Rank, in 1960, stated that he considered the 'National Circuit' was

'at least as good as its predecessor, the so called Gaumont release'.⁹

This did not, however, appear to be the case. Independent cinemas who had previously been 'attached' to the Odeon or Gaumont release were now competing with a local Rank cinema with a unified and improved product. Unless there was an absence of an ABC cinema in the area (in which case they could take the ABC release) they were bound to have a restricted choice of films. They were left, in fact, with the 'left-overs from the ABC and Rank release pickings.' (P. 49).¹⁰ These 'left-overs' became even poorer with the increasing shortage of films at the time. Few cinemas, anyway, were willing to attach themselves to the third circuit and by 1961 the 'National Circuit' ceased to exist in the form suggested by Rank. It was re-named the 'Third Release' and in this form continued until 1963, when it could no longer be considered a serious, coherent alternative to the Rank and ABC circuits.

At the same time as the creation of a single release system, the Rank Organization cut back on its film production activities, leaving only its Pinewood studios intact. It nevertheless continued its investment in new films through its distributing companies. The major film interests of the Rank Organization and ABPC were therefore, by the sixties, in the field of exhibition. Their power was strengthened, however, by the vertical integration within each company of exhibition, distribution and production activities, plus their interests in other fields.

Rank has as its ultimate holding company, Film Development and Research Ltd., through which Odeon Cinema Holdings Ltd., controls all the interests of the Rank Organization. The subsidiary companies are numerous, they include – Gaumont British Ltd., A. Kershaw & Sons Ltd. (an investment holding company), Odeon Properties Ltd, Rank Advertising Films Ltd, Rank Audio-Visual Ltd., Rank Bush Murphy Ltd., Rank Film Distributors Ltd., Rank Film Processing Ltd., Rank Hotels Ltd., Rank Leisure Services Ltd. (this includes Bingo Clubs, Top Rank Bowling, ballrooms and many other concerns), Rank Precision Industries Ltd., Rank Strand Electrical Ltd., Rank Television and General Trust Ltd. (film studios), Southern Television and Rank Xerox Ltd.

ABPC, now coming within the EMI Organization, also have an impressive number of interests. Amongst their many concerns are – Associated British Cinemas, Anglo-American (Film Distributors) Ltd., Associated British Productions Ltd., ABC Television Films Ltd., Warner-Pathé Distributors Ltd., Thames Television Ltd., Pathé Equipment Ltd., Shaftsbury Insurance Brokers Ltd. and Technicolor Ltd. (30 per cent interest).

These are by no means all the subsidiaries of the two companies, but what these lists illustrate, is the economic strength behind the two major film companies in Britain. Not only do they have control of the two film release systems in Britain, but they are the only companies with substantial interests in production and distribution as well as exhibition. They have, in addition, in the precarious world of the film industry, adequate resources outside their film interests to cushion them through periods of economic uncertainty. They were, for example, able to weather the fall in cinema admissions much better than the independent exhibitors who had no outside interests. In 1965, Rank owned 329 cinemas, 210 fewer than in 1953. ABPC had 264 cinemas in 1965, 127 fewer than at the end of 1952. These contractions were considerably less than those suffered by the independents.

ABPC would seem to have had fewer interests outside the film industry than Rank, but their spread of concerns is much wider, and therefore nearer the position of Rank, now that they have been taken over by EMI. The American 25 per cent interest of Warner Brothers has been substituted for a British interest, but at the expense of increased power and booking strength for ABPC.

The two major circuits, between them, controlled 29 per cent of Britain's cinemas in 1965, a figure which rises to 44 per cent when estimated in terms of cinema seats. These figures may not appear excessive, but, as Terence Kelly pointed out in 1965¹¹ the cinemas of the big two are generally of better quality (for one thing they have the resources to modernize their buildings). The quality of their cinemas gives them the power to charge higher prices than average for admission. Also, they own 72 per cent of London cinemas, which bring high returns (London revenues are estimated to contribute 25 per cent to 30 per cent of a film's gross takings in the United Kingdom) to the distributors. Their ownership of the majority of London cinemas adds extra power to their exhibition chains, because, when booking a film for London, they book it for all their suitable first-run houses elsewhere. Many other independent and minor circuit houses, in areas where one or both of the two majors have no cinemas, will automatically take the film up and lesser houses will take the film on its second run. Thus, a distributor who gets a London booking from Rank or ABC is ensured of a country-wide showing as well, due to the fairly static structure of the distribution and exhibition process.

Distributors will actually hold up their products in the hope of a showing on the Rank or ABC releases, rather than take an earlier showing in independent cinemas. The trade's Cinematograph Film Council Sub-Committee, set up in 1963 to look into Cinema trade practices, found a widespread complaint that there was a shortage of British films to meet the 30 per cent exhibition quota. Yet when they looked further into the

position, they found that there was a surplus of films trying to find release. The abundance was at the level of the two main circuits, where revenues were greatest. The shortage was at the level of the third release, which could only offer returns amounting to half those of the two major combines. In 1961 an average film on a Rank Release would return between £85,000 to £95,000 and on a third release only £35,000 to £40,000.¹² As the monopolies commission points out,

‘a booking with all or most of the cinemas of one of these circuits normally yields so much more than a booking with any other exhibitor and so high a proportion (70 per cent) of a film’s total earnings in Great Britain, that for most feature films what is known as a circuit booking . . . (i.e. with Rank or ABC) is now regarded as essential’. (p. 12)³

This does not mean that a film booked by one of the major circuits will inevitably be shown by all their cinemas. This depends on the booker’s assessment of a film’s popularity. Both Rank and ABC give half circuit deals to films they consider have specialized appeal.

Rank and ABPC are, therefore, by their dominance of the exhibition sector of the industry, able to exercise very great power over the sort of films produced. This is obviously true of films they have helped finance themselves. These films, irrespective of quality, generally have ‘pencilled in’ far in advance, the traditionally best dates for a circuit showing. Films financed by them, but distributed by companies traditionally ‘tied’ to their circuits, also tend to get preferential treatment. Rank, for example, gives first preference to films they have produced themselves or that they have part financed, and then to the suppliers ‘tied’ to Rank (Columbia, Twentieth Century Fox, United Artists and Disney). The regular supplying of films by a particular distributor cuts out any competition for films between the two releasing circuits and also puts at a distinct disadvantage the one major distributor who remains independent of the combines – British Lion.

‘The best films (i.e. those with obvious box office appeal) have no difficulty in securing circuit bookings and suffer no discrimination, in practice most films do not stand out in this way and it is this category that preferences apply.’ (p. 100)³

Thus, without any extensive activity in the production field, Rank and ABPC are able to influence the kind of films made. Few distributors, other than British Lion, will back films that they consider to be unacceptable to the two combines and British Lion may be avoided by a British producer because of the distribution disadvantages and for this reason films that step outside the requirements of Rank and ABPC may never be made. This is a situation that J. Arthur Rank himself appreciated many years ago. When Rank bought the Gaumont-British circuit in the mid-thirties it was because according to Alan Wood,

'he could see only one answer: if he was to produce British films in a big way he must become his own distributor and exhibitor too, or no-one might ever see them. "I decided," he said afterwards "that the film business had got into the hands of the wrong people". He, Arthur Rank, got it out of their hands and into his own.' (p. 80)⁶

At that time, the men with the power were the distributors. This is still to a large extent true. Distributors are the main source of finance for films. Yet their decisions as to whether or not films are commercially viable, must rest on whether they think they are acceptable to Rank and ABPC, the source of their best returns. Thus, the balance of power has, to a large extent, shifted towards the exhibitors – or, at least, towards two exhibitors.

The inflexibility of Rank's and ABPC's policies may stunt not only the making of films that are artistically worthwhile, yet will never attract the mass audience, but also films that might have box-office appeal, yet step outside the contemporary clichés. Penelope Houston, in 1966, maintained that 'a film without obvious circuit potential is as likely as not going to remain unmade'. This position differs from that of a few years before when it was 'the films not being shown' that were causing so much frustration.¹³ In the early sixties, it is true, producers were succeeding in making films that went against the taste of the two major circuit bookers but it was not an easy feat however. Harry Saltzman, who set up the independent production company of Woodfall Films, with John Osborne and Tony Richardson said of *Look Back in Anger*,

'You would never believe the trouble we had to get Tony Richardson accepted by the distributors and financiers'

and

'You see the structure of most of our biggest producing companies is such that they will not accomodate new creative ideas. They have an almost pathological fear of them.'¹⁴

However, John Terry, Managing Director of the NFFC in 1961 said that he did not think that new film makers, at that time, would meet with the frigid reception they expected from the establishment (that is, the NFFC and the major distributors). *The Angry Silence*, for example

'was produced with the full and enthusiastic support of the "establishment"'.¹⁵

The example he gives is unfortunate, in the context of his statement, but does illustrate the changing situation at that time.

Richard Attenborough and Bryan Forbes, who produced *The Angry Silence*, worked on the film for nothing because the film

'was turned down by all the major distributors when they were asked for financial backing'.¹⁵

This can hardly be described as a situation of 'enthusiastic support from the establishment'. But the establishment was becoming slightly more receptive to films that stepped outside the accepted pattern of previous years. This situation was clinched by the financial success of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, produced by the newly created Bryanston Films and partly financed by the NFFC. Bryanston films was a loose confederation of production teams and individuals who aimed at shifting the balance of power slightly towards the producer. They used British Lion as a distributor, but planned the programme themselves. They were financed by British Lion, Lloyds Bank, Alliance Film Studios and Rank Denham Laboratories. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was, therefore, produced outside the established structure of the British film industry, yet its box-office appeal could not be ignored by the establishment. As Lindsay Anderson says,

'Karel's immense success changed the mentality of the producers overnight. Now new directors and unknown actors seemed to be all they were looking for.'¹⁶

Karel Reisz was later offered the chance of directing *This Sporting Life* by Independent Artists, who had bought up the film rights of the book. Reisz, though, wanted a chance to produce a film and therefore suggested Lindsay Anderson as director, with himself as producer. It is a sign of the changed attitude of the major companies, that Independent Artists agreed to Reisz's suggestion and Anderson, who had never before directed a feature film, was signed on. The film was distributed early in 1963, through the Rank Organization. Financially, it was a disaster and it cannot be coincidence that in December of the same year, John Davis of the Rank Organization said that

'the public has clearly shown that it does not want the dreary kitchen sink dramas'

and that

'Independent producers should take note of public demand and make films of entertainment value.' (p. 51)¹⁰

Yet independent producers had been making films of entertainment value. They had struggled, often with the help of the NFFC, to make films that contained fresh themes and used new actors and directors, and many of these films had been successful. The *Motion Picture Herald* showed that out of the 39 most popular British films in the United Kingdom between 1957 and 1962, 28 were independently produced. Just because Rank had jumped on the band-wagon of the 'Social Realism' film at a time when public demand for that type of film was on the wane, is no criticism of the independent producers.

Distributors face the commercial discipline of a release system dominated

by Rank and ABPC. They finance films that are acceptable to the booking agents of these two organizations and therefore tend to travel a well-worn path, until independent producers come up with a film that is different, and yet when exhibited proves successful. It is at this point that the establishment starts to take a financial interest. The independents are, therefore, the innovators and yet they are the section of the industry least able to take the financial risk.

Independents have great difficulty in finding the initial finance for their films. The NFFC has completely subsidized a few films (for example, *The Kitchen* and *I Was Happy Here*) but its general practice is to supply the end money for films. This means that producers must initially find a backer who will put up the bulk of the finance of a film. The NFFC has as its mandate that it is only permitted to loan to

‘persons who in its judgement have reasonable expectations of being able to arrange for the production and distribution of cinematograph films on a commercially successful basis.’¹⁷

The NFFC point out, however, that its main demands come from producers who can’t raise ‘end money’ elsewhere,

‘and to refuse them in favour of safer business would have led to a drastic reduction in the volume of British film production’.¹⁷

Once a film is made there are still problems. The circuits may be unwilling to book a film they consider would not have popular appeal. For instance, *The Leather Boys* was held up for months before it was shown, and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *Look Back In Anger* had difficulty in getting to the screen. This can be financially disastrous for independents, who have a cyclical arrangement with a bank, allowing them to withdraw from a fund which is kept more or less in equilibrium with the revenue paid in from film release. If a film is held up for more than four months after completion, the cycle is broken and interest charges are made.

The dominance of Rank and ABC over the exhibition field, to a very great extent shapes the British film industry. Both are companies operating in a commercial manner to make a profit. This is what one would reasonably expect. What is questionable, is their assumptions about the market. Often the public will accept an unusual film, but the combines are unwilling to take the risk.

Recent changes in the structure of the two major combines do not indicate any alteration in this situation. The Rank organization is, at present, cutting down on film production, but this has been a trend within the organization for some time and does not have any major significance. Rank’s power lies in its exhibition interests, which remain strong.

ABPC is radically extending its direct film production activities and also has plans to improve its exhibition facilities, by creating 'cinema centres', where a number of films are shown in small theatres within the same building and with a common foyer. These are innovations which have occurred since the takeover of ABPC by EMI, early in 1969. Prior to this, ABPC's main investment outside the film industry was in television. EMI has a wider spread of interests outside films than ABPC, and, with their added financial strength, the new company can presumably afford a much greater degree of experiment in the sphere of film production and exhibition.

ABPC's production programme is headed by Bryan Forbes, who considers the production plans to be,

'the most serious and ambitious attempt to revitalize the British film industry in twenty years.'¹⁸

Certainly, the fifteen new films planned, appear to be a deliberate move away from the sensational, superstar type of film made recently, in an attempt to capture the American market. They are also films which are wholly British financed – ABPC will be putting up most of the £5,000,000 to £10,000,000 estimated cost of the programme. Finance for one of the films, *Forbush and the Penguins*, will also come from British Lion and the NFFC. Two new directors are being introduced – Lionel Jeffries, the actor and Paul Watson from the Royal College of Art and Television. Kevin Brownlow will be directing *The Breaking of Bumbo* (from the novel by Andrew Sinclair) with Andrew Mollo, and Frank Nesbitt will be directing his second feature film *Dulcima*.

On the whole, though, the new programme does not have anything very radical to offer. Apart from two new directors, the names are very familiar – Peter Sellers, John Mills, Richard Attenborough, Joseph Losey and Harold Pinter are all involved in some way in Bryan Forbes's plans. There is also a definite moral tone to the programme. None of the films will involve themselves with 'the pornography of violence' that Bryan Forbes so much deplores. Instead they will aim to spread his 'entertainment malaria' (sic).¹⁹ Good stories and great performances are what is exciting in the cinema, according to Bryan Forbes, an attitude which is, in many ways, paralleled by that of John Davies of Rank, who recently announced that 'way out X-certificate films . . . have little public appeal'.²⁰ One can assume that, at the moment, the independent producers will remain the innovators in the industry. EMI's money has put ABPC in a position where they can involve themselves more fully in film production, but the films being made are certainly not so revolutionary that one could claim that they are part of a 'revitalization' of the British film industry. On the contrary, now that ABPC has EMI's backing, it is in a financial position equal to that of Rank. The structure of the film industry has therefore become slightly more rigid.

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Claude Chabrol

DON ALLEN

It would be premature to attempt a definitive appreciation of Claude Chabrol at this relatively early stage in his directorial career. Nevertheless, with the appearance of *La Femme Infidèle*, a provisional assessment may be justified, together with an attempt to refute some of the more controversial remarks made by Roy Armes in his article on *Les Biches* in the March-April edition.

After his early work, particularly his first two features *Le Beau Serge* (1958) and *Les Cousins* (1959), which were so difficult to classify and therefore extremely disturbing, it is generally agreed that Chabrol's period in the wilderness began. For several years he made 'bread-and-butter' survival films for the popular commercial market with the speed and prolificity, if not the integrity and originality, of Godard. Chabrol's contention that, after the severe treatment meted out to *Les Bonnes Femmes* (1959) by the critics, he was obliged to make the 'Tiger' films or starve, should be balanced by his facile, and no doubt frivolous, dismissal of the role of the critic: 'When I go to the butcher's, I do not write in a newspaper what I think about his meat; I eat it and if I do not like it I go elsewhere . . .' Chabrol's decision to continue to make features, even if they were mainly money-spinners, has many illustrious precedents in the film world.

His more recent films have tended to slot him into the stylish, 'intelligent', commercial bracket. *Le Scandale* (1967), whose English title was *The Champagne Murders*, showed Chabrol's fascination with the grotesque, with the meal-time mores of the bourgeoisie and their moral void – prefigured in the *La Muette* episode of the sketch film *Paris vu par . . .* (1964). In addition, with its transference of guilt theme and its mélange of detective story and social criticism it anticipated *Les Biches* and *La Femme Infidèle*. *La Route de Corinthe* (1967) transcends the usual limitations of the spy-thriller genre in its blurring of the traditional clear-cut divisions between 'goodies' and 'baddies'. Thus some characters are never clearly assimilated into either camp and others are engaged in a continual to-and-fro from one side to the other. The influence of Hitchcock (on whom Chabrol has, of course, written a book) revealed here in Chabrol's detachment from the characters, his highlighting of the disturbing detail and the personal appearance of the director is a constant factor in his work. Other features of *Le Scandale*, which go to make up a recognizable Chabrolian style, are his love of the practical joke and knockabout farce and the elegant fluidity of

the camerawork – the latter the work of Jean Rabier, who has been his Director of Photography since *Les Godelureaux* (1961).

Roy Armes has already dealt with *Les Biches* (1968) at some length in the March-April edition. His use of the expression 'New Wave' is open to criticism: either it should be rejected entirely, on the grounds that 'There is no new wave; there is only the sea,' (Chabrol) in which case Roy Armes's 'perfect example of the stereotype image of New Wave directors' becomes an irrelevance or the exact sense in which the term is used, should be defined in detail. Roy Armes himself does define the term in his summary of *French Cinema since 1946*, but he fails to do so in his uneasy use of the term in this article, where he talks of 'men whose names were commonly linked together (often erroneously) a decade ago'. Surely, if they have no common links, there is no reason to compare their subsequent progress, nor to expect them to produce collectively a 'revolution in French film production', which, according to Roy Armes, 'has failed to materialize'.

Roy Armes may well be allowed the odd slip over minor points of detail: Chabrol's output up to and including *Les Biches* was not 15 films but 18 (15 features and 3 sketches); 1968 was not the 'first time in 7 years' that Chabrol had worked with scriptwriter Paul Gegauff – script and dialogue for the episode *L'homme qui vendit la Tour Eiffel* in the sketch film *Les plus belles Escroqueries du Monde* (1964) were also by Gegauff. Less pardonable is the attribution to François Truffaut of a non-existent film. The credits should read: François Truffaut – *La Mariée était en noir*; in Roy Armes's imagination – *La Mariée était trop belle*.

A more serious disagreement is in the sphere of opinion and interpretation: for example, the statement that 'Rohmer's *La Collectionneuse* and Chabrol's *Les Biches* are both typical examples of a kind of French cinema . . . which presents with more elegance than depth the study of social behaviour and sexual interaction among a tiny handful of characters away from the pressures of life,' together with the corollary: 'and if *Les Biches* seems infinitely the better it is simply because technical polish and sheer professionalism are more effective in the cinema than pretentious pseudo-intellectual moralizing'. If Roy Armes does not find much depth in Chabrol's study of the way in which people evolve under intense psychological pressures, or Rohmer's treatment of the same theme with characters who are rather more self-consciously engaged in resolving their existential problems, we may well enquire what will satisfy him. In both films, the characters may not be too preoccupied with obtaining the next crust of bread (with the exception of Why, at the beginning of *Les Biches*) but they are certainly subject to 'pressures of life' of a higher order, as they struggle to survive in a terrifyingly barren, amoral world 'Pretentious pseudo-intellectual moralizing' is more like the stock reaction to the latest Godard than an appropriate comment on Rohmer's serious, intelligent analysis of human motivation.

An interesting parallel between Chabrol and Flaubert is suggested by Roy



Les Biches

Armes's allegation of Chabrol's desire to avoid all elements of autobiography (which he surely fails to do in *Le Beau Serge*, set in his own village and with many details culled from his own life.) Flaubert too, sought to be 'absent from his work'. Flaubert and Chabrol are further related in their doomed search for 'total objectivity' – an unattainable goal for both writer and film-maker, who must needs have a viewpoint and are involved initially in the process of creation of characters and the selection of details of behaviour. At best, they may refrain from overt (omniscient author-type) comment but their presence must inevitably be felt behind the scenes, to a greater or lesser degree. Like Flaubert, Chabrol needs to

satirize 'human stupidity'; hence, the work of each is permeated with pessimism. Chabrol's statement in an interview in *La Revue du Cinéma* last May: 'All that we see around us is only material for laughter or anger. As one cannot be eternally angry, one might as well laugh', is scarcely compatible with the demands of rigorous objectivity.

Surely Roy Armes is mistaken in finding Chabrol's handling of his actors unlike that of Truffaut. Compare Chabrol's remarks on directing as 'making the actors feel at home,' with Truffaut's 'I do not 'direct' actors, I help them . . . to feel at ease in a part, by sharing with them my own ideas and reactions, by simplifying the dialogue if they find it difficult to say, by explaining my intentions and familiarizing the actors with them'. A further point of comparison is the predilection of each director for particular actors. Thus Truffaut has often worked with Jean-Pierre Léaud and Jeanne Moreau; Chabrol, with Maurice Ronet and Stéphane Audran (alias Madame Chabrol).

Chabrol's allegation that actors who submit themselves totally to a director, want the film to be made for them in return for this submission, which Roy Armes implies is a 'shrewd' observation about an actress such as Jeanne Moreau, should not pass unchallenged. Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* and *La Mariée était en noir* are much more than star vehicles for Jeanne Moreau. She is certainly an integral part of both films; so is Stéphane Audran in, for example, *Les Biches* and *La Femme Infidèle*. In *Jules et Jim*, although Moreau is necessarily the apex of the triangle, her role is no more dominant than those of the almost interchangeable, eponymous males, whose Rosenkrantz/Guildenstern, ego/alter ego relationship is a major theme of the film. In *La Mariée était en noir*, the prominence of Moreau is purely a requirement of the plot, and springs from the William Irish novel on which the film is based.

Roy Armes dismisses the 'emotionally gratuitous murder' as an unsatisfactory ending to *Les Biches* 'in much the same way as the endings of some Truffaut films are (*La Peau Douce* for instance)'. On the contrary, the internal logic of both these triangular situations demands violence as the inevitable result of such intensive psychological pressures. The ending of *La Peau Douce* contains the additional elements of irony and suspense in that it is preceded by the tantalizing, though illusory, possibility of a reconciliation, frustrated apparently by chance but never a really viable solution. Thus this ending even adds an extra dimension to the film.

A final area of disagreement is over the question of social criticism in *Les Biches*. In the first place, it would seem inconsistent of Roy Armes to praise Chabrol's attempts at 'total objectivity' on the one hand, and on the other, to comment on its purely marginal social criticism. Nevertheless, whilst Chabrol's interest in social environment is not his main preoccupation, how else should he condemn wealth and the idle middle classes, other than by 'giving the audience a long look at (them) first'? And what about the use of the two buffoonish parasites Robègue and Riais whose very presence in the film as hangers-on/court-jesters/'kept'



Hélène proposes the toast: 'To this memorable day!'

men constitutes a tacit condemnation of the society which tolerates them? The biggest criticism of *Les Biches* lies in its excessive modishness – lesbianism, experimental triangular situations, sexual perversions, 'artistic' Paris, the exclusive set of St. Tropez and so on. Its main assets are its satisfyingly logical construction; the superb acting of Audran – harsh, icy yet vulnerable – and Jacqueline Sassard – sensual and in need of warmth and comfort – and its plotting of the undercurrents of human desire in a world where anything goes.

La Femme Infidèle is concerned with another bourgeois triangle, with the husband at the apex and only two of the possible sexual permutations explored (i.e. there is no homosexual dimension). The plot is again minimal: At an early stage, Charles the husband knows of the adultery of his wife Hélène; she later discovers he knows; he does not know she knows he knows . . . The film represents the triumph of conjugal love. Under intense pressure, for a brief moment, the façade cracks; total disintegration is threatened. Then the breach is rapidly, tacitly, papered over; the ranks are closed; a reconciliation has been achieved, via murder. The characters' actions are always conditioned by the routines of the bourgeois society which has moulded them. Their conversation, incongruously polite and formal even after the most disruptive activities (lovemaking, body-dumping) preserves their surface serenity.



The Champagne Murders

As in classical drama, we are shown only the painful climax to a series of events that have been gradually increasing in intensity for a period of time prior to the beginning of the film. Because our viewpoint is, for the most part, that of the husband, we suffer progressively with him. His bearing, always calm and dignified, transforms the usual ridiculous role of the cuckold into a serious study of the plight of the faithful husband. His poise and humour are revealed as masks for his desolation and despair by the otherwise disproportionately violent murder. The forces of disorder and destruction are always close to the surface in the Chabrolian world, never more so than when intelligence, self-control and rational analysis seem to be uppermost. Once again, in a Chabrol film, we have the transference of guilt theme; the husband, who, at the outset, appeared to be designated as victim, becomes the victor in the second part of the film. A fairly new departure for Chabrol is his sensitive depiction of the deep tenderness, more powerful than purely physical excitement, which unites husband and wife. The film's special flavour is achieved by a combination of this marital tenderness with Hitchcockian suspense, revealed subtly in the undertones of the conversations between husband and wife. Yet to all this must be added Chabrol's black humour, the malevolent glee which leads to his apparent refusal ever to take things entirely seriously. Some of the peripheral characters can be seen not merely as affording comic relief, but also as implying criticism of a society which relies on drink to escape from its neuroses. This category would include, for example, the drunken man and woman in the night-club. Similarly Brigitte, the exaggeratedly



Pre-sleep rituals: Hélène and Charles listen to chamber music

provocative secretary, is the product of a sex-orientated society – ‘She is one of those women,’ as Chabrol’s script-note says, ‘who never forget that men think about only one thing’. The function of the other minor characters is unashamedly comic. In this category are the unshaven man eating a boiled egg in the café from which Charles telephones; the van-driver whose vehicle collides with Charles’s Mercedes and the policeman who appears on the scene; and the taciturn police-officer, Gobet, of the nervous tic.

The film’s masterly pre-credits sequence establishes the deceptive impression of domestic happiness in an opulent setting. Hélène and her mother-in-law look at photographs of Charles, who arrives with their son Michel and a bunch of flowers. But this shot on which the scene freezes and blurs for the superimposition of the credits – Charles with his hand on his wife’s shoulder, her hand in his, his mother covered with flowers, his son looking at him with affection – is just too idyllic to be true. It is as artificial and contrived as the photographs we have just seen, and, like them, perhaps effects Charles’s desire to arrest the passage of time and to impose permanence upon an essentially fleeting moment.

As Charles goes towards the house, his vulnerability somehow emphasized by his characteristic walk (as integral a part of Michel Bouquet as the amorous lurch is of Jacques Tati), he already has the audience’s sympathy. Hints of the imminent, half-expected shattering of his world now follow fast: Hélène’s fleeting moment of panic on the telephone; Charles’s

reassurance-seeking 'Do you love me?' (a question more characteristic of a woman); the following of ritual patterns, Michel's kissing them both goodnight, their viewing of television (the intermission); Hélène (out of shot): 'What time are you leaving tomorrow?' Charles hiding his anxiety; a further dig at bourgeois cultural standards – Hélène saying she will go to the cinema and find out what is on from her hairdresser – and we are in the bedroom scene. Hélène reveals a lot of thigh as she paints her toe-nails and then lies languorously on the bed; Charles, having performed his record-choosing rite, is reading in bed, she is stifling. She opens a window, then returns to bed. Charles smiles, puts out the light and wishes her goodnight. Both lie restless and awake; Charles switches on the light and kisses her gently. She tells him he is tired and he agrees. She gives him a maternal kiss; he switches off the light.

From this moment, and until Charles's documentary proof of his wife's infidelity, the film records by a series of closely observed expressions, nervous gestures, double-edged questions, furtive glances, Charles's gradually increasing suspicions. Twice, when he is laughed at by the ill-shaven character in the café, and when his drunken neighbour in the night-club tells him '*Vous avez l'air d'un con*' (untranslatable), Charles's insecurity and potential status as a cuckold are revealed. This section of the film, which deals with his uncertainty, reaches a climax in the sequence where Charles and Hélène lie in bed after making love on their return from the night-club. Charles has in his eyes what Chabrol calls 'the agony of a man who does not know; who does not know if his wife is satisfied; if this face with its closed eyes does not hide some bitterness, some hatred; if his happiness is real; if his wife is deceiving him.'

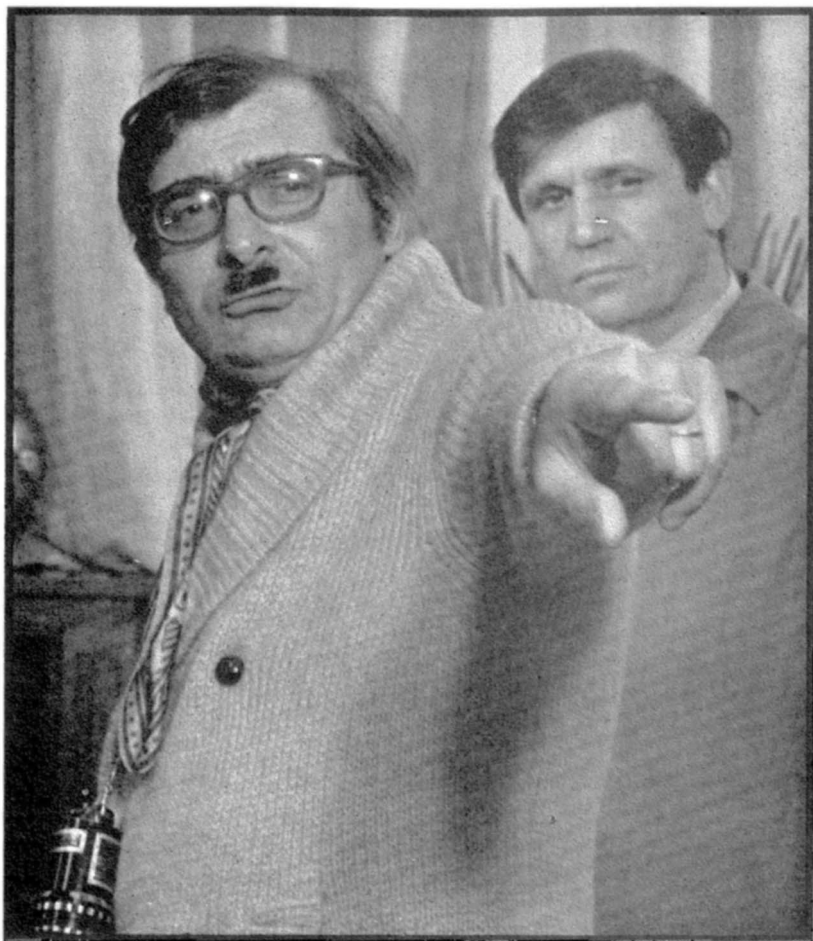
The other major section of the film is concerned with Charles's reactions when he discovers the truth about his wife. Initially, he does nothing. The hollowness of his daily routine is emphasized by his mechanical gestures on his return home from the office; he switches on the television, pours himself a whisky, sits on the sofa and the family farcically celebrates Michel's school prize as Hélène proposes the unintentionally ironical toast 'To this memorable day'.

The next two episodes involve the lover Victor (Maurice Ronet) in his flat at Neuilly. He is seen first, offering cakes, tea and gentility in a post-coital scene with Hélène and revealing the norms of the society they both inhabit, when he says that he is divorced but considers himself a good father as he sees his children often, i.e. once a month! A passionate kiss (contrasting with the gentle familiarity of Charles and Hélène) concludes the episode. The next day Charles drives to Neuilly, sinister music strikes up, excitement is generated and the exquisite confrontation scene begins. Charles and Victor seem to speak the same language. They agree that Bourbon is preferable to Scotch in the morning. Charles appears relaxed and hyper-civilized; Victor is tense, embarrassed, cornered. The conversation flickers from apparent masculine complicity (until Victor talks about Hélène's gentleness and tenderness, at which Charles lowers his gaze and



Pre-sleep rituals: Hélène paints her toe nails

perceptibly loses his composure) to routine banalities about the advantages of living in the suburbs. The sight of an enormous lighter (a wedding anniversary gift from Charles to Hélène) lying on Victor's dressing-table symbolically fires Charles's suppressed, violent anger. The final, excruciating touch occurs when Victor helps Charles out of the room, suggests he is not used to whisky and offers him an Aspro. Charles's agonizing id is at last released. He kills Victor and Chabrol, the professional thriller director begins to have fun. We relish our masochistic identification with Charles as he works meticulously to cover up his traces; water gushes sickeningly into his bucket; the body is inched painfully, alarmingly towards the car; sudden strident music bursts out as he lifts the corpse into the boot and grows more insistent as he drives off in a daze. After a series of tense incidents he finally flings the shrouded body into a stagnant pond with a



Chabrol directing his most recent film *Que la Bête Meure*

frighteningly loud splash. Having borrowed liberally from Hitchcock throughout the film, Chabrol here pays direct homage to *Psycho*, as the body takes an interminable time to sink. Suddenly we cut to Charles making polite conversation again at his son's party and finding solace in a whisky, as is his wont. Normalcy has re-asserted itself.

From this point on Charles is in the ascendancy. The semblance of idyllic, colour-supplement living is resumed. Hélène breaks out once and weeps alone like a wounded bird. The visit of the police officers results in the release, at dinner afterwards, of the subcutaneous tensions from which the whole family is suffering but, after an abnormally violent scene between Hélène, Charles and Michel, the return of the police has the effect of closing the ranks against the common enemy. Charles lies to support Hélène's story and their tacit complicity leads to renewed tenderness. When Hélène later discovers the photograph of Victor in Charles's

pocket, she burns it, then walks towards her husband, who is pruning roses in the garden with Michel, with an inscrutable expression on her face, as if she had just been born. She stops and looks at Charles. The film might well end there, as Chabrol agrees. Yet it does not. In a moment of touching passion they declare their mutual love. Charles goes off to see the police officers, who have reappeared and now wait sinisterly at the gate. The camera watches, first from the standpoint of Hélène, as Charles goes to the officers, then from that of Charles, as he turns to look at his wife and son. The final backward tracking shot with forward zoom seems to express Charles's desire and seals the rediscovered unity of the family cell. The separation has been filmed as if it were a reconciliation.

La Femme Infidèle is Chabrol's most accomplished film to date. With its emphasis on suspense, muted irony, beautiful camerawork, delicacy of touch in its handling of human relationships, increasing fascination with the problems of the bourgeoisie, rather than simply with ridiculing them, it represents probably the ultimate in Chabrol's refinement of his own technique. What is still lacking in Chabrol's work is the revolutionary new departure necessary to substantiate any claim to have done more than explore to the full the confines of the commercial cinema. *La Femme Infidèle* represents the quintessential Chabrol, within these self-imposed limits. The transcendental Chabrol is still to come.

Comment

ROY ARMES

I must confess that I find Mr. Don Allen's reservations about my account of *Les Biches* somewhat surprising, since, from the evidence of his article, it would seem that our general estimations of both the value and the limitations of Chabrol's work are remarkably similar. As, however, he goes out of his way to attack my own formulation of our jointly held view, I welcome this opportunity to make my own position clear. To deal with his specific objections in turn:

1. Having, as Don Allen admits, attempted a definition of the New Wave phenomenon in my book on the French cinema, I saw no need to repeat myself in this particular review. My unease with the term arises from the fact that (a) there was no really unified movement, (b) there was an undeniable renewal, with dozens of new directors making their débuts at much the same time, and (c) the whole thing was sold to the public (and producers) under a somewhat misleading brand image.

Viewing the latest works of Chabrol (*Que La Bête Meure*), Rohmer (*Ma Nuit Chez Maud*) and Truffaut (*La Sirène Du Mississippi*), I find that what once promised to be a revolution has been, instead, a sort of conformism and reconciliation with the pressures and accepted formulas of the commercial cinema. Why does this surprise Don Allen? He himself concludes his account of *La Femme Infidèle* with the admission that 'what is still lacking in Chabrol's work is the revolutionary new departure necessary to substantiate any claim to have done more than explore to the full the confines of the commercial cinema.'

2. 'Throughout my account of *Les Biches* I have talked of 'films' when Mr. Allen would insist that I talk of 'feature films'. I am as aware as Mr. Allen is that Chabrol has contributed sketches to three collective films (cf. *French Cinema Since 1946*, Vol. 2, pp. 46-47 and 151). Gegauff worked with Chabrol on a series of four feature films concluding with *Les Godelureaux* (released on 17th March, 1961). With *Les Biches* (released in March 1968) they began a new series of films together which so far includes *La Femme Infidèle* and *Que La Bête Meure*. To talk of a seven year gap in their collaboration seems therefore meaningful, though in the interval, Gegauff did indeed work intermittently with Chabrol, not only writing the sketch for *Les Plus Belles Escroqueries du Monde* but also contributing to the dialogue of

the feature film, *Le Scandale* (1967), a fact that Mr. Allen, despite his quibbles, strangely overlooks.

3. With regard to the Truffaut film, I must admit that my slip is quite inexcusable. In my defence I can only say that I find the work so totally unmemorable that I have difficulty in recalling even the title. I experience the same trouble with Truffaut's more recent film, *La Sirène Du Minnesota*. (There was a film called *La Mariée est Trop Belle* made by Pierre Gaspard-Huit in 1956. It starred, I seem to recall, Mylène Demongeot).

4. My 'allegation' of Chabrol's desire to avoid all elements of autobiography rests on the director's own statements. Since Mr. Allen obviously distrusts my translation of the quotations with which I illustrate this point I suggest he consult *Cinéma 66*, No. 109, p. 34.

5. If Don Allen can really see no difference between the actors in *Les Biches* and those in Truffaut's films, I await his planned monograph on Truffaut with some trepidation. Does he seriously think that (to quote one of his own examples) Maurice Ronet represents for Chabrol what Jean-Pierre Léaud does for Truffaut?

6. My doubts about the depth of Chabrol's study of sexual behaviour in *Les Biches* derive precisely from what Mr. Allen and I both see as one of the film's main assets, namely its 'satisfyingly logical construction'. The fact that Chabrol (and Gegauff) can manipulate the characters with such ease and dexterity indicates clearly the extent to which these are mere cardboard cut-outs, endowed with an actor's personality, but not with a human being's complexity.

7. One does Chabrol's status as a director no good at all by seeking social commitment in his work. Mr Allen gives him a quite alien dimension of stodgy pretentiousness by reading a 'criticism of a society which relies on drink to escape from its neuroses' into the night club scene of *La Femme Infidèle*. Alas for the serious-minded Don Allen, Chabrol is a cynic, an ironist unconcerned with the sufferings of his puppets but happy to manipulate (à la Hitchcock) the emotions of a gullible audience. If we wish to appreciate the full flavour of his style we must refuse the easy opportunities to identify with the characters which Chabrol provides, and not seek profundities where they do not exist. Instead we must savour the way in which Chabrol mocks our concern with the moral issues he raises, travesties our cherished preconceptions and gives us a bad joke or a caricatured bit player at the very moment when we anticipate solemnity. Chabrol is less of a moralist, but a far better stylist, than Don Allen would have us believe.

The Comic Art of Jacques Tati

ROY ARMES

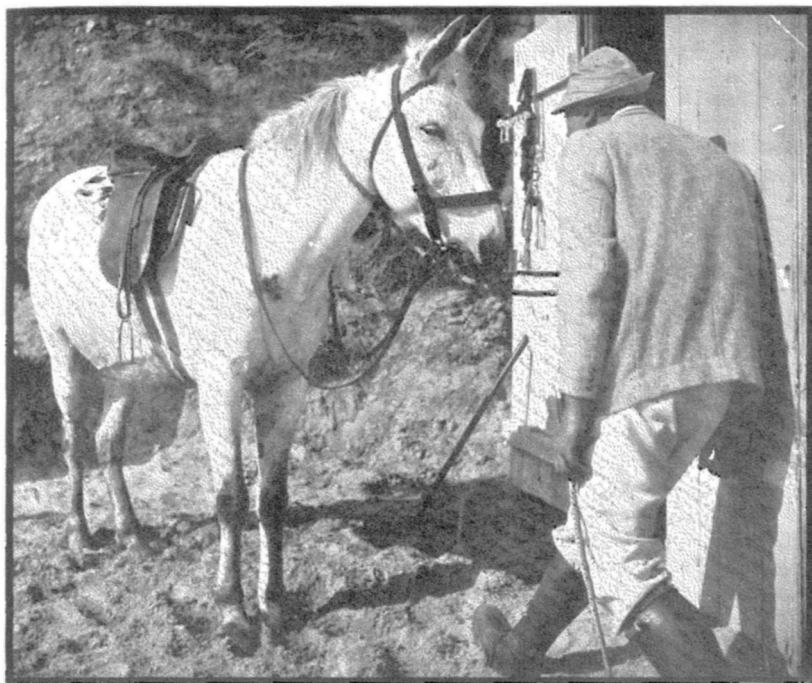
Jacques Tati's latest film, *Playtime*, has been received with something short of rapture both here and in France, and to explain their unease, critics have made much of the amount of time and money expended. Whatever one's view of *Playtime*, it is undeniable that Tati has used the resources of the super-production to express a totally personal and idiosyncratic vision. Far from being in any way impersonal or unbalanced by commercial requirements, *Playtime* is the purest example of Tati's comic art and the outcome of a lifetime's concern with the question of screen humour. For twenty years Jacques Tati has followed his own chosen path, indifferent to fashion and the comfortable certainties of the genre movie. With an austerity and concern for minute details which equal, if not surpass, those of Robert Bresson, Tati has made just four feature films. In these he has not made the slightest concession to producers (who have, however, almost invariably cut his films prior to their release) and, while avoiding the trap of repeating past successes, he has remained totally consistent in his approach. A comparison of his two long interviews with *Cahiers du Cinéma* is most instructive: though almost ten years apart, the two statements follow with perfect coherence. In a form sadly neglected by film-makers of the post-war era, Tati has contrived his own comic universe and imposed his personality on every frame of his films, to such an extent that, despite the comparative paucity of his output, he may be justly compared to the great comedians of the silent era.

Looking at the history of film comedy, Tati sees a process of what one might call 'democratization' at work. The first comic films were musical-hall acts, like those of Little Tich, simply recorded by the camera. This conception of comedy as a virtuoso solo effort reached its height with Keaton and Chaplin, then gradually gave way to comedy based on team work: the double act of Laurel and Hardy or the quadruple chaos of the Marx Brothers. In *Jour de Fête*, his first feature,



he created an unforgettable comic character, François the postman, who is worthy of comparison with Buster or Charlie. But Tati felt that this type of performance – the contrived and artificial act of a brilliant mime – left little scope for development. He created Monsieur Hulot, 'a man you can meet in the street, not a music-hall character', a comic Everyman, who fits into the community and whose behaviour is never more than slightly exaggerated. In the course of the three films he has now made featuring Hulot, Tati has striven to redress the balance between the 'funny man' and his environment, with the result that Hulot has been pushed further and further into the background. From being the clearly defined central character of *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, he became the foil of the gadget-ridden Arpel family in *Mon Oncle*, and is only an episodic character in *Playtime*. His first appearance in this is symptomatic: our attention to the figures in the foreground is disturbed by the sound of an umbrella being dropped somewhere, but by the time we actually catch sight of him, Hulot is already striding off with his inimitable loping gait.

As Hulot becomes less important, the minor characters increase in richness and variety. In Tati's words: 'Instead of its being Hulot, as in *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot*, who does or executes just about the whole number of gags that there are in the film, I leave these gags, as you might say, to others, choosing the character best qualified to realize them. . . . The real gag, the true gag, for a head-waiter is to have it done by a real head-waiter.' In consequence Tati's films take an ever-widening social world: the tiny village of *Jour de Fête*, the seaside hotel and its tourists in *Les Vacances*, the contrasting districts – old quarter and modern factory – in *Mon Oncle* and the whole modernized Paris of the future in *Playtime*. The angle of vision has changed too, perhaps to reflect a development in French life over the past twenty years. In *Jour de Fête* modern life, in the form of a film on American postal methods, made only a temporary impact on an unchanging community, but in *Playtime* we never get outside modern man's steel and glass prison and catch only fleeting reflections of the past (traditional Paris in the shape of the Eiffel Tower or Notre-Dame is seen only momentarily, reflected in the plate-glass doors of the hotel or airport). With the new widened scope has come a steady growth of technical sophistication from the primitive black and white of *Jour de Fête* to the colour, 70 mm. format and stereophonic sound of *Playtime*. There is no denial of the past, for *Jour*



Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot

de Fête was both planned and shot in colour and only the failure of the colour process was responsible for the eventual emergence of the film in monochrome. Tati, like Resnais or Eisenstein, conceives of the film as a total art form and the idea of a cheap, hit or miss film is alien to him. As a result his films are the most beautiful comedies, from a visual point of view, since the great days of Buster Keaton.

While the level of achievement attained by Tati in all his films is consistently high, two of them are cast in what one might call 'traditional' moulds and as such constitute remarkable works of comic art but in no way enlarge our conception of what comedy is. The one, *Jour de Fête*, is simply an outstanding variation on the traditional notion of the funny man, while the other, *Mon Oncle*, with which Tati feels he 'wandered' a little from his real preoccupations, is a pure comedy built on conventional juxtapositions such as modernism and tradition, Arpel and Hulot, inhuman order and well-meaning chaos. In *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* and *Playtime* on the other hand, we find the wholly original Tati concern with the utilization of the cinema's 'possibility of opening a terrace on to life to make all its riches known'.

The basis of this, as of any kind of comedy, is observation, and Tati constantly goes out walking so that he can observe behaviour and listen to conversations in pubs and at football matches. What is novel in Tati is the moral value he gives to such observation. For him, watching the foibles of humanity is our best defence against the pressures of modern life: 'You see, people often complain about the lack of humanity in modern architecture. They imagine themselves to be overwhelmed and crushed by these massive constructions. But if they knew how to observe, they would learn that life is the same there as anywhere else. A few added comforts are not going to change the nature and character of individuals. And it is the continuous performance offered by the behaviour of these individuals which must make our life amusing.'

From this derives the revolutionary nature of Tati's comedy: the way in which he allows the process of observation as such to determine the stylistic pattern of his films. From using the camera in a conventional way to record an invented performance based on accurate observation but stylized and hence divorced from reality (as was the case with François in *Jour de Fête*), Tati has moved on, in works like *Les Vacances* and *Playtime*, to the much more difficult and original idea of giving his audience a direct look at the behaviour itself in context. This is what lies behind his description of the cinema as a window opening on to life. *Playtime*, he told one interviewer, 'is an open window. And through this window the spectators are going to see what happens. I hope that they will recognize people they know: a neighbour, a tradesman, a colleague. It is such people, who are just like the ones you come into contact with every day, who are the heroes of *Playtime*, not Monsieur Hulot. Monsieur Hulot does not detach himself from the group. He is on the same level as the rest of the characters, the comic actor is not the only one to be funny. If you know how to look, the most serious people are sometimes the funniest.' The use of the window is fundamental to *Playtime*. Throughout, one has the impression of eavesdropping, of seeing human activity in a frame that shows up its absurdity. In this way the spectator becomes akin to the most pathetic character in the whole film, the unfortunate waiter who tears his coat and subsequently becomes a repository for all the staff's torn and soiled clothing, and is therefore forced to watch the festivities from outside. A sheet of glass allows us to be, at one and the same time, part of a scene and detached from it and often, by



Mon Oncle

cutting off one element, such as the sound, the glass allows us to observe the scene in quite a new way. The steel and glass world of *Playtime* gives rise to a number of gags of this kind: the workman needing a light, Hulot chasing a reflection, the little man walking into a door, all the play with the non-existent Royal Garden Hotel door and so on.

The patterns of form Tati adopts reflect his concern with preserving the essential quality of the observation. In *Playtime* the plot itself could hardly be simpler. It deals, the director tells us, with 'a group of American women who are visiting Europe at the rate of two capitals a week. Whereas they had expected to find picturesque old houses in Paris, they in fact encounter exactly the same motorways, the same street-lamps, the same office blocks, the same cars as elsewhere. But finally they do manage to discover Paris: through its inhabitants.' To use such a slender plot-line to support a film originally running two and a half hours makes considerable demands on an audience, but these difficulties are deliberately imposed by Tati. He could quite well have built up the role of Hulot by giving him most of the gags, or have contrived some dramatic climax or a comic surge of incident. But all these things have been done before and instead he has preferred to use his powers of invention to weave together a succession of disparate and

hardly developed little incidents involving a large number of characters over the period of twenty-four hours. Characters arrive and depart, gather and disperse with their movements corresponding to the natural rhythms of life rather than to the needs of an imposed dramatic structure. Tati had already used this idea of construction in parts of *Mon Oncle*, an example being Hulot's disastrous attempt to restore the Arpels' ornamental bush. Hulot begins this before the reception but is unable to complete his work and returns to it only much later when most of the audience will have completely forgotten the whole incident. In the context of an otherwise normally constructed comedy this kind of episode seemed disorientating and out-of-place to many spectators and critics, and even in the case of *Playtime* where the avoidance of dramatic devices is deliberate and systematic there are still those who complain at the lack of tension and order.

In fact, *Playtime* has a deliberately designed shape. It begins slowly and Tati has said that at the beginning of the film he wanted the decor 'to be fairly cold so that people feel somewhat imprisoned by it, adapt badly to it'. For this reason the opening airport sequence is presented in such enigmatic terms that we come to imagine we are in a hospital. This gives rise to some good gags and underlines the impersonal, clinical atmosphere of modern architecture (no-one feels at home in a hospital waiting room). This sequence also has the characteristic manoeuvring of a vast number of characters in an elaborate set which remains a constant feature throughout *Playtime*. These characters come and go in the course of the film, often reappearing after half-an-hour or so still engaged in the same activities long after we have forgotten their existence. This is a deliberate attempt at realism on Tati's part: 'All the time it's like that in life. . . . It was interesting to base a whole construction on this, taking into account these natural time schemes.' This gives the film its particular rhythm and illustrates a use of the time possibilities of the two-hour film which no one had explored before. In this respect Tati's handling of time corresponds to his use of the physical dimensions of the large screen to convey minute happenings: for him the most exciting thing to depict on a Cinerama screen with full stereophonic sound would be the dropping of a pin.

In the first half of *Playtime* the characters are disorientated – the American women by their arrival in a new city and Hulot and his business colleague by their failure to find each other in the glass-walled labyrinth of office buildings



Playtime

The audience too is disconcerted with them for it takes time to feel at home in this kind of setting. But in the second part of the film, when the characters all gather at the Royal Garden Hotel to dine, the barriers between them are broken down. With this change comes an alteration of tone, and what had been serious and measured in the first part now degenerates into more hectic farce. It is hardly by chance that Hulot's contact is the doorkeeper and that together he and his friend contrive to smash the plate-glass door and thus allow life to flow through the disintegrating decor of the hotel. As the formal atmosphere is destroyed, the old Paris of the boulevard cafés is recreated by the people who become masters of an environment which no longer over-awes them. The quality of light is most important, for example, the drugstore that had been filled earlier with a bilious green neon glare now becomes warm and lively in the early morning light. In a similar way, towards the end of *Playtime* the problems of traffic jams and hold-ups dissolve into a game as the cars attempting to go round a traffic island take on the feel and appearance of toy vehicles on a children's roundabout. In this transfiguration of life into a balletesque movement, there are certain similarities between Tati and the early René Clair and certain scenes in *Playtime* are more aptly to be described as choreographed by

Tati than as simply directed by him. But unlike Clair and so many other French directors, Tati does not use a written text or dialogue as the basis of his film. In his own words: '*Playtime* is quite the opposite of a literary film, rather it is written like a ballet. It is written in images, and the dramatic construction derives from this vision. I know my film by heart and on the set I never look at the script any more.'

Just as the structure of *Playtime* is elaborate but avoids conventional dramatic build-up, so the acting style shows a refusal to develop roles or allow actors to dominate a scene. Tati's choice of his actors is meticulous but they do not in any way transcend the parts they play: 'Everytime (I make a film) I have a great deal of preparation to do. I walk about a lot. I try to find people whose behaviour and character are related to those of the characters described in the script. I choose them not for their acting gifts but for their natures. I intend to make stars of my characters, not those who play them. As for the little people, the supporting parts, yes, these are the ones I prefer. I have looked for them just about everywhere, they breath truth. I think I have succeeded in extracting some extraordinary comic effects from them. . . . Today what matters is to give a greater tone of truth to comedy.' Tati is therefore driven to employ non-professional actors for virtually all roles except that of Hulot, using people who do not act but simply are. And he is convinced that in this way the best results are obtained. Of the scenes in the Royal Garden Hotel he has said: 'You can see people who really know how to go through their pockets looking for their wallets and real, slightly snobbish, ladies who do things no-one could possibly imitate without falling into caricature.' He is particularly fond of one memorable character: 'No comic would have been as good as the waiter who acts as coat-rack and clothing store for the others. The chap is really tremendous: you can feel how that upsets him.' Though Hulot himself is diminished in importance this is compensated for by the existence of a whole horde of doubles or false-Hulots in the film. Some of these are developed into real characters (like the chap at the exhibition, for whom Hulot is mistaken by the irate German manufacturer), others, like the negro Hulot, are mere silhouettes. Tati has admitted that one of his dreams is for Hulot to appear in other films, to figure as an extra standing at a bus-stop for instance. This he feels is the direction in which comedy will develop in the future: 'The day that people

laugh heartily at this sort of comic structure they will find it very difficult to laugh at a single character for an hour and a half.'

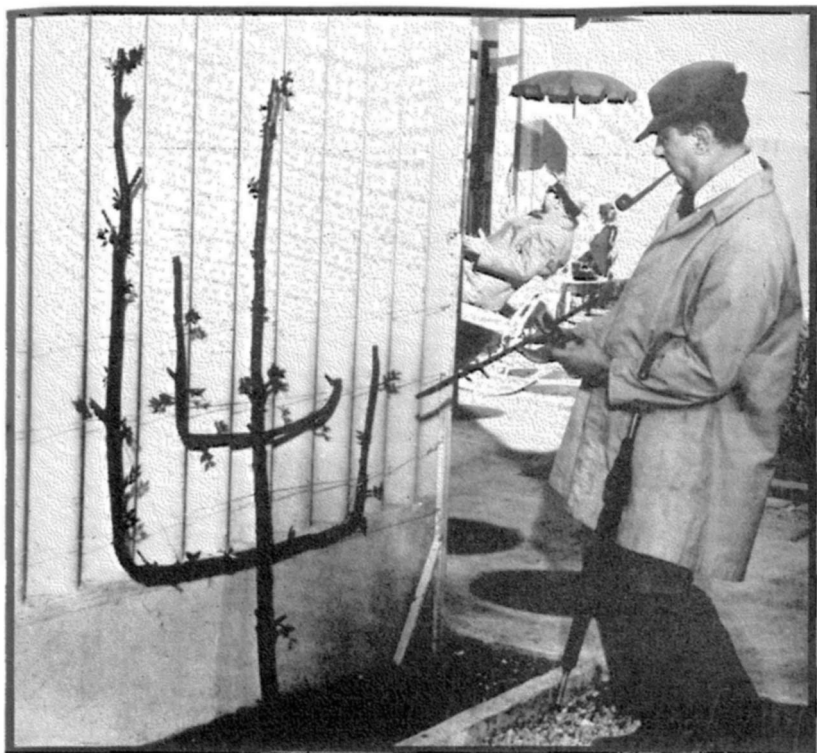
Tati's approach to film-making is the very antithesis of that of the old Hollywood script-writers who, whenever they felt tension to be flagging, had a guy come into the room with a gun in his hand. But of course his approach makes greater demands: 'If you don't observe what happens, you get bored, that's obvious. . . . There is no effect for its own sake.' The same refusal of exaggeration underlies Tati's whole photographic style, his approach to the 70 mm. format and his utilization of colour. The silent comedians, like Keaton, were well aware of the enormously enhanced impact obtained by doing stunts which were obviously not faked though extremely dangerous and Bazin has commented on the effect of the same device in drama (as when you see the child and the hungry lion in the same shot). Tati, preferring lengthy long-shots to close-ups, refusing to cut or underline his effects, applies the same procedure to his own more delicate and unspectacular comedy. His comments on the model aeroplane whose wings sag as the ventilation system fails are most interesting in this connection: 'If I had taken a close-up of the plane everyone would have seen it but it's not a gag simply for the sake of a gag, it's a plane which melts because the people are hot, so you have to see them sweating at the bar at the same time, that's part of the whole thing. You have the cause and the effect in the same scene.' This approach to the film image is a logical development from the kind of concerns already apparent in *Mon Oncle* in which, as Tati has said, there are a few camera movements but you don't feel them: 'I tried to give an impression of relief through the fixity of the frame. I didn't even change the lens. If you do that, you transform everything: your chair is no longer the same, space changes.'

Like Alain Resnais, who shares his fondness for the old black-and-white silent cinema, Tati sees the cinema as existing essentially in sound, colour and three dimensions, any other format being no more than an historical accident. He needs the kind of resources employed in *Playtime* not to create spectacle, but to give a more adequate impression of real space. He has admitted that even when he shot in black and white he always thought and imagined his films in colour. Experiences like the failure of the colour process in *Jour de Fête* and the use of a black-and-white copy of *Mon Oncle* for editing purposes have convinced him that you do not

get the same story if you change from colour to black and white and he told an interviewer that *Playtime* was 'unthinkable' except in colour. For him colour 'is not decorative: it is a primordial element in the narrative' but he never uses it for purposes of exaggeration. Before beginning *Playtime* he had decided that 'colour should above all not distract the attention or turn it away from the characters'. Tati's reasons for choosing 70 mm. are much the same as those behind his decision to employ colour. He used this format because it 'corresponds to the dimensions of today's world. People don't build little streets any more but motorways, not little houses but office blocks. People think that 70 mm. is useful only for super productions with cavalry charges and half-dressed film stars. In fact it is just as astonishing a format in which to film a clerk sleeping at his desk or making a bird out of folded paper. The comic effect comes from a change of dimension. Thus comedy of observation takes on its true value, underlined by the use of stereophonic sound which adds a sound gag to the visual one.'

Tati's constant concern with realism in comedy, whether on the level of acting, colour, photography or the gag itself, has naturally provoked a number of comparisons with the most important of contemporary realist movements in the cinema – Italian neo-realism. There is validity for such a comparison though there are distinctions that need to be born in mind. First, in his attitude to the studio reconstruction of reality, Tati is very much a part of that French tradition exemplified by the Marcel Carné of *Quai des Brumes* and *Le Jour se lève* or the René Clément of *Gervaise*. If in *Jour de Fête* Tati set his brilliant mimed performance as François in a real rural setting, by the time he made *Playtime* he had reverted to the more characteristic French approach of putting authentic and realistic characters into a specially built and contrived setting. Of course, neo-realism in Italy too was based on the concept of the reconstruction of reality rather than a simple reproduction of it in newsreel fashion, but the whole concept of 'Tativille' on which so much time and money was spent would have been alien to an Italian director.

An even stronger difference between Tati and neo-realism lies in the attitude of mind brought to bear on the problems of modern life. In Italy, neo-realism was a cinema of attack, of social criticism, a cinema that asked questions and probed the all too easy customary evasions. With Tati, this whole dimension is quite lacking.



Mon Oncle

Tati is totally a-political, he wants to observe but not analyse or evaluate social behaviour. In his world there are no villains and no unresolvable social dilemmas and, as he sees it, his purpose is 'not to criticize but to bring a little humour'. Unlike the neo-realists he does not want to change life, but simply 'to make people participate a little more'. He does not attack the Americanization of French life (typified by his latest film's title, by the 'drugstore' and the 'Royal Garden Hotel') or even the modern architecture (his buildings are impeccable tasteful, even beautiful). Instead, he merely comments on the use people make of these resources and the way in which they allow themselves to be dominated by their surroundings.

Bearing in mind these qualifications, it is still possible to see Tati's work, and *Playtime* in particular, not as the continuation of the French comic tradition – which tends to be that of boulevard wit à la Audiard or rustic farce in the manner of Fernandel – but as the culmination of the kind of concern with comedy in Italy which, in the best works of

Luigi Zampa, Luciano Emmer and Renato Castellani, ran parallel to neo-realism proper. Like these directors and their writers – men like Sergio Amidei and Cesare Zavattini – Tati draws his inspiration directly from life seen and overheard on the streets but he is far more audacious in the extent to which he allows this observation to shape his films. In this way he fulfils some of the theoretical requirements of this kind of Italian comedy much better than the works of Italian directors themselves. Perhaps the nearest Italian film to *Playtime* is Emmer's *Sunday in August* (*Domenica d'agosto*) which deals with the adventures of no less than 102 characters on a single Summer's day. In Emmer's film, however, the incidents are all embryonic dramas: a man is arrested for armed robbery, a meeting occurs that may well flower into love, a policeman discovers his girl is pregnant, etc. But in Tati the dedramatization is complete and his film contains nothing even remotely dramatic in this sense, we simply see people failing to meet, taking photographs, eating or working. If it is borne in mind that the roots of Italian forties comedy lie in the escapist, 'white telephone' fantasies of the studio-dominated Fascist era, it is easy to see how Tati in *Les Vacances de Monsieur Hulot* continues and in *Playtime* transcends a line of development that had petered out in Italy by the middle fifties. This is, in fact, one measure of Tati's importance in world cinema. Like Jean Renoir in the thirties and Luchino Visconti in the forties and fifties he establishes a link between the two dominant traditions of European film-making and contrives a synthesis of much that is best in two distinctive approaches to cinema.

The Studio

KINGSLEY CANHAM

In 1933, Darryl F. Zanuck left Warner Bros. Inc. and formed 20th Century Productions with Joseph M. Schenck, producing such films as *The Bowery* (Raoul Walsh), *Moulin Rouge* (Sidney Lanfield), *Clive of India* and *Les Misérables* (Richard Boleslavsky) and *Call of the Wild* (William Wellman). When Fox amalgamated with 20th Century Productions in 1935, he became vice-president in charge of production. One of his first personal productions was John Ford's *The Prisoner of Shark Island* (1936), the story of Dr. Samuel Mudd, the doctor who treated John Wilkes Booth, unaware that Booth had assassinated President Lincoln some hours previously. This was the first serious subject Ford had been assigned at Fox; the resulting film was uneven, but is amongst the more stylish of Ford's Thirties output.

Nevertheless, the company relied on the comedy of the Ritz Brothers, Alice Faye musicals, including the off-beat *Rose of Washington Square* (1939), Tyrone Power vehicles which were either musical or romantic, sometimes both, to bring in revenue, until Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) and *The Long Voyage Home* (1940) re-established his reputation as a social director and gave Fox the opportunity to expand more serious areas. The Forties films divide quite evenly into two streams, with musicals built to suit the talents of John Payne and Betty Grable or Sonja Henie, all lavishly embellished with the flamboyant touches of directors like Busby Berkeley, Walter Lang, Irving Cummings and Gregory Ratoff, exotic settings, colourfully staged dances and a generally unvarying plot. All benefited from the skills of such cameramen as Leon Shamroy and Ernest Palmer. Their colour compositions gave the films a uniform look, crisp colours and sharply defined images combined with a hard, brassy, relentlessly professional approach.

The black and white films of the period were polished and elegant, boasting an even better set of cameramen in Gregg Toland, Joseph La Schelle, Joseph August, Arthur Miller, and Joe MacDonald. The high level of talent in the studio included technicians on the payroll, as well as the leading stars and contract actors or extras. Darryl Zanuck helped mould this forceful production team in a remarkably short space of time.

* The title of a recent book by John Gregory Dunne, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, N.Y. 1969.

In 1943, he became head of production at 20th Century Fox. Under his aegis, several cycles began, for instance, the semi-documentary thriller originating as a spy cycle with Hathaway's *The House on 92nd Street* (1945), but soon developing to include crime films such as Hathaway's *Call Northside 777* (1948) and Dassin's *Thieves Highway* (1949). The former was the first in a string of films in which the hero dug into a dead girl's past. Not all the films of the period fit neatly into pigeon holes or cycles.

A social film, like Henry Hathaway's strikingly beautiful *Brigham Young – Frontiersman* (1940) shows little of his customary relaxed style, and none of the accompanying humour. It is an intense film, more concerned with the rights of man and with the pioneering spirit than with any formal biography or examination of the Mormon sect. Dean Jagger plays the leading role with his usual sympathetic understatement, whilst the conventional hero and heroine, played by Tyrone Power and Linda Darnell fade into minor importance. In mood and in visual images, the film is reminiscent of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Our Daily Bread* (1934, King Vidor). Jane Darwell and John Carradine are cast in similar roles to those they played in Ford's films, whilst the scene of the community fighting the crickets, which are destroying their crops, brings to mind the farming community desperately digging an irrigation furrow on their land in the Vidor film. It is without doubt the most atypical of all Hathaway's films.

Similarly, Edmund Goulding had established a reputation for films of suave sophistication and, latterly, as an expert at 'women's weepies' made at Warners. Fox utilized his talents with *The Razor's Edge* (1946) but opened up new fields for him with a highly successful comedy, *We're Not Married* (1952) and a savage drama which Tyrone Power hoped would introduce a change in his career, *Nightmare Alley* (1947). This was a personal and artistic success but failed commercially, and Fox gave Power little opportunity in later years. Sleazy sets, squalor, the bitter script and cutting direction earmarked the film as one of the most extraordinary to come from any studio.

The studio suffered its share of labour troubles in the late Forties and early Fifties, but few of its personnel were involved in the Un-American Activities witch-hunt. Their films reflected the general slump which the American cinema underwent at this time, but nevertheless were the first studio to use the wider ratio screen-Cinemascope in *The Robe*, *How to Marry a Millionaire*, *Beneath the Twelve Mile Reef* and *Three Coins in a Fountain*. Samuel Fuller claims that he was assigned to *Hell and High Water* (1954) because he was not technically accomplished and would make a useful guinea pig to carry 'the can' if the new ratio did not adjust well to rapid camera movements. Fox were also in at the start when TV directors entered the film industry, bagging the services of Franklin Schaffner.

Richard Zanuck joined the story department in 1954 and the following year was promoted to the New York publicity office. By 1957, he was Assistant Producer on *Island in the Sun* (Robert Rossen) and *The Sun also Rises* (Henry King). A year later he became vice-president of Darryl F.

Zanuck Productions, beginning a long association with Richard Fleischer as producer of *Compulsion*.

'New York has never been able to find a substitute for the inspired Hollywood entrepreneur or studio administrator' says Paul Mayersberg in his book, *Hollywood The Haunted House*. According to John Gregory Dunne in *The Studio*, Darryl F. Zanuck has tried to reverse this adage by staying in New York, handling the financial end of the work, whilst Richard makes the films. Anonymity is the keynote of the younger Zanuck's approach to the role of a production chief in the new Hollywood – the parallel with the character of Monroe Stahr in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, *The Last Tycoon*, which in turn was based on the MGM 'boy wonder' production chief Irving Thalberg – is worth bearing in mind here. Stahr did not believe in taking credit on his films; Thalberg took little credit; both would have approved of Zanuck's habit of keeping a leather-bound script copy of every film he had produced, and of his tenacious efforts for the rights of the company.

The elder Zanuck had resigned as production vice-president in 1956, but with the demise of the studio under Spyros Skouras, and the latter's forced resignation – which according to Dunne, Zanuck still rubs in at board meetings to this day, – he let it be known he was ready to stand as president of the company. He was duly elected, and began to look around for a production chief, until his search ended when Richard nominated himself! He recently denied charges of nepotism, saying: 'Quite frankly, naming me as production chief made a lot of sense. As the largest stockholders, my family stood to lose the most if the company went under. What nearly killed this company was the politics, the antagonism between the money people in the East and the picture people out here. With D.Z. in New York, and me out here, that antagonism is gone now.'

Raised in Hollywood, it is not surprising that Richard Zanuck sees and thinks in terms of plots, gimmicks and story angles. Nor is it surprising that two of the key Fox directors at present are Richard Fleischer and Robert Wise. Both are experienced technicians in their late fifties. Both started their careers with RKO, Fleischer as a writer on RKO Pathe shorts in 1942, Wise as a cutter in 1933. Their early careers were promising in different directions. Wise was on Val Lewton's production team, turning out low budget horror films of considerable merit, in company with Jacques Tourneur and Mark Robson. *The Body Snatcher* (1945) with Boris Karloff is probably the best of the series. Snatches of film come to mind as one recalls his career. In *The Body Snatcher* Boris Karloff follows a flower girl into the fog. Her melodious version of 'Loch Lomond' is cut off in mid-note as the killer strikes; a rapidly cut struggle to the death, on some lonely sand dunes, in *Born to Kill* (1947) almost suggests the use of a handheld camera; a 'cinema verité' style interview with a mountain rescue team played by non-professional actors as they prepare for a scene in one of his earliest bigger budget films, *Three Secrets* (1950). As he advanced into the 1950's his meticulous care for style and technique was swamped by

vapid scripts such as those for *So Big* (1953) and *Until They Sail* (1957). He has now been given the unenviable task of directing Julie Andrews musicals for Fox. Though *The Sound of Music* (1965) promises to be an all-time box-office champion, it is thirteen years since he last made a really good film. Fleischer, a less dedicated technician, as the years go by, has directed a similar run of bad films, or partially redeemed films such as *The Boston Strangler* (1968) and *Fantastic Voyage* (1966). His forte has always been the masterly build-up of suspense such as *The Narrow Margin* (1952) or *Violent Saturday* (1955). He has categorized himself as being typecast by his previous film, though this does not show in his completed material. In the past decade he has also made a fictional reconstruction of the Leopold-Loeb case (*Compulsion*), a tricky court drama in which two plaintiffs and their lawyers have remarkably similar lives, and in which the three principal players have dual roles (*Crack in the Mirror*); an out-door safari story (*The Big Gamble*); a Biblical epic (*Barabbar*); a catastrophically bad musical (*Dr. Dolittle*) as well as *Fantastic Voyage* and *The Boston Strangler*. Since then, he has worked on a big budget war film (*Toro Toro Toro*) only partially completed at the time of writing, and a 'non-political' biography of Che Guevara.

Change is constant on the Fox scene. In 1967, Zanuck showed little interest when Phil Gersh, an agent representing both Wise and Fleischer, suggested *Candy* as a property – 'Jesus, Phil. You're not peddling that one?' Three years later, after his success with *Joanna*, British writer-director Mike Sarne has been assigned and removed from a Fox version of *Myra Breckenridge*, Gore Vidal's novel which is far more outspoken than *Candy* in its original form. Shooting has recently been completed on *Planet of the Apes Revisited*, a sequel to Franklin Schaffner's highly successful allegory. The original was hawked from studio to studio before Warners took a Rod Serling screenplay, but unable to budget the film successfully, re-sold it to Arthur Jacobs, the producer for \$360,000. He begged and pleaded with Richard Zanuck, financing a make-up test and specimen dialogue scene for a nine man jury ('If any one of them laughed we were dead. But none of them did and we were in business.').

Gone are the days of Henry Koster musicals, with Deanna Durbin enthraling an audience with her enchanting voice as Leopold Stokowski conducts the symphony orchestra. His name still gains him an entry to Zanuck's office, but his nerves are on edge throughout the interview, according to Dunne. His agents nod off, or glance around the office as he unfurls a hopelessly outdated series of clichés about youth orchestras and crippled children. Zanuck listens patiently, and offers no comment until Koster is out of earshot. A few weeks later, another Hollywood veteran Pandro S. Berman calls on the younger Zanuck, to discuss problems on *Justine*. He suggests John Schlesinger or Lindsay Anderson as director, with a screenplay by Larry Marcus as bait, which would mean dropping the screenplay prepared by Ivan Moffatt. He is given more of Zanuck's attention than Koster, although he is kept waiting a long time in the outer

office. The film has since been completed, using the Marcus script, but employing the talents of Joseph Strick, who resigned as director following a clash with Berman, and George Cukor. Cukor is now resigned to the role of patching up unfinished films – he has been announced to take over from Sarne on *Myra Breckenridge*.

This situation in which a veteran film director of some 38 years experience is delegated to patchwork on material, in lieu of his making a personal project – Cukor's *Nine Tiger Man* was dropped from the production schedule of Fox by Richard Zanuck in the early stages of pre-production – is one common to Hollywood. Presumably Cukor accepts it in the same way as younger men like Don Siegel and Sam Peckinpah, in order to keep working. For instance, Siegel's name does not appear on the credits of a recently released Western, in *Death of a Gunfighter* (1969), which is credited to the fictitious Allan Smithee; in fact, Siegel replaced the original director, Robert Totten, midway through shooting.

The package deal is the most important part of the film today. As Peckinpah said recently: 'You gotta know the people with whom you are working.' It is a sign of the times that, with increasing frequency, directors are building up a stock company of actors and technicians with whom they work regularly. Men like John Ford, Preston Sturges and John Wayne have done this in the past, but at the time, most of the people involved were under long-term contract to the studio concerned in the first place.

Twentieth-Century Fox reflects the flexibility which is being imposed on film-making through the adoption of new ideas, and the financial restructuring of the major companies to maintain steady production. The only company in American today which relies on the old studio monopoly system, and the shaping of material to reflect a set company policy, is American International – the 'switched-on' progressive producer/distributors. Making films with a materialistic interest foremost, they follow the trends and gimmicks, milking each dry, developing their more outspoken material with a deliberate ambiguity and often buying up material of a similar nature made by smaller independent companies to release under their banner, thus eliminating competition in a particular field. Although restrictive, this policy is not totally destructive as it has produced films of the nature of *The Trip* (1967, Roger Corman); *Born Losers* (1968, T. C. Franck) and *Easy Rider* (1969, Dennis Hopper). By operating this policy, American International are able to project their immediate image far more successfully than a studio like Twentieth-Century Fox where the diversity of their output, coupled with the slackening of the studio control, results in a loss of what used to be described as the 'look' of a studio.

Stars can be made overnight on the basis of a single film; it is no longer sacrilege to make a film employing non-professionals amongst the cast or technicians for instance in Arthur Penn's *Alice's Restaurant* (1969) or Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1968), or as in the case of actors such as

Dustin Hoffman or Jon Voight, to promote them as unknowns, when they have worked as extras or in bit roles for several years.

The studios are, however, still in a relatively strong position since they have the major say in the financing and distribution of the finished works, including television sales in bulk package deals or the latest idea – films made especially for television distribution. This raises an interesting area for speculation as a definite difference exists in the quality of the work in the cinema as opposed to work in television on the part of many directors, who are working in both media. The studios increase their revenue by making their lots available to television companies. It is not clear who needs who, and how the separate media would function without this mutual exchange. Allowing for technological advancement, it is debatable how far this exchange can extend, without the one medium engulfing the other.

Footnote

Since this article was written, Richard Zanuck has replaced his father as Company President.

Diary of a TV Documentary

A road safety film 'It happened to me'
first broadcast on Israel Television on
March 13th 1969

ALAN ROSENTHAL

Israel Television went on the air early in 1968. I was working as Adviser, and Producer Director within the documentary department. We had been discussing and preparing projects for some months and had formulated a short list of fifteen films that warranted top priority. Road safety came high on the list and was given to me. I was appalled both by the accident rate in Israel, which appeared to be one of the highest in the world, and by the lack of public concern.

Because of commitments to other projects, it was early December before I could consider the film seriously.

Generally, I prefer a subject that defines itself automatically in time and space and has an inherent framework. This was satisfied, for example, in an old project I'd written in which we followed three girls into the army and through their basic training. There was the clearly defined beginning . . . feelings, fears, patterns of social life of the girls before the army. There was the middle-life in training, growth of social relationships and acclimatization. And the ending – the passing out parade, and the splitting up of the group. The road safety film seemed at first glance to have too wide and nebulous a subject. What was to be the area. Should I say the Israeli drivers were the worst in the world? Would concentrating on the driver serve any purpose? Maybe the focal point should be the car itself. But then again, Israel is not a car manufacturing country. A car is a luxury in Israel. Taxes ensure that a Mini costs about £1500 sterling. Therefore, any discussion of the car as embodying sex, virility, snob appeal etc. had to be a little guarded. I had to rethink public and private attitudes to car use and car behaviour that I had brought with me from England and the States.

Research

The period of research and interviewing took about a month. Time was wasted because of lack of a secretary and the fact that my male PA had to keep rushing home to attend to his month-old child. As he inevitably fled with my research files unwittingly packed in his bag I spent much of that month drinking coffee and cursing. I had him to draw up a list of all Israeli road and safety authorities, key public and private transport figures, and then arrange interviews with the most interesting.

At the same time, I wrote to the motor correspondents of five English newspapers asking for their help in providing source material, and did a long letter to the director of the Road Research Laboratory asking for

film and advice. A great deal of accident research was going on in the USA so I also wrote to four of the American research institutes for their findings. Finally, I loaded myself down with some bedside reading like Nader's *Unsafe at Any Speed*, some learned mass communication studies on attitude change, and Meyer Parry's *Aggression on the Roads*.

I knew I would have to show a great number of car crashes and cars involved in rigged tests. But this kind of footage wasn't available in Israel so I turned instead to English and American sources.

The English Road Research Lab. was most helpful and supplied material on their special test track. Volvo was good on seat belts, while Fiat provided two excellent films with spectacular induced crashes. The only disappointment was General Motors, the world's largest automobile manufacturers; they supplied six feet of a car moving up to a barrier; I wrote a second urgent letter and received six two-minute advertising films, which were of little use.

I visited the police laboratories in Tel Aviv and was fascinated by the polygraph or truth machine, and by the complex apparatus used for determining the exact cause of an accident. I spoke to a father who had lost his son in a crash. He was strong, but almost broke down when describing the loss and the effect on the whole family. I spoke to hospital patients and officials. I visited motor courts. I watched pedestrians and read endless reports and analyses. And all the time I was trying to sift the useful from the useless, to answer two questions; why do accidents happen? What can be done about them?

Even during research, a few points were very clear. I wanted to start the film with a crash and hospital situation, and I wanted to finish the film very starkly by showing, for the first time in the film, skeletons of dozens of crashed cars in a wreckers yard.

Most people agreed to appear, but a few scenes were more delicate than others. This was particularly true of those scenes involving patients. I set out deliberately to look for a child accident victim. When I found him, he was six, had been unconscious for two weeks, and was having to relearn the arts of eating and moving. He was one of the most beautiful children I had ever seen and would photograph perfectly. Obviously, if I spoke to the mother in the hospital she would say no, so I went personally to see her and spent an hour explaining that we wouldn't disturb the boy and that some good might come out of the filming. She reluctantly gave her consent. I was also becoming convinced that one ought to analyse the pressures on the driver and the characteristics of good and bad drivers. The path led to the Medical Institute for Driver Research, and a couple of University teams working on drivers' problems. A lot of psychological research was being done on tracing the characteristics of the accident-prone driver. It caught my imagination and linked up with Parry's book which I had been reading on driver aggression but I spent far too much time on it and it came near to ruining the film's balance. I saw it in the editing stage but in the research I thought this might provide the corner-stone of the film.

Some research turned into blind alleys. I wanted to speak to drivers who had been involved in accidents, but the police refused to divulge names. I tried to get prison interviews with convicted dangerous drivers but was again balked. I spent a couple of afternoons getting wonderful material from crazy taxi drivers only to have their boss ban the interviews.

Script

After three weeks I had more notes than I could cope with. However, in formulating the script I knew there were restrictions.

First, I had a severely limited budget and only six thousand feet for a half hour film. This meant a shooting ratio of six to one, which is low for this type of film: I couldn't shoot random interviews hoping to gain a few specks of gold. I had to know precisely what I wanted to shoot and then be as economical as possible. Secondly, my camera crew were in demand by other Producers, so a pet idea of having them on call every night for a week, prepared to go to a crash had to be abandoned. Thirdly, Israelis are not used to television and therefore appear stiff and formal.

With this in mind, I prepared the outline shooting script for submission to the Head of General Programmes. It was fourteen pages long, with shooting notes down one side of the page and an outline of linking narrative or interview comments alongside the other. In essence, the intention of the film was to show the human suffering caused by accidents, the reason for the accident and how they might possibly be averted. The flow of ideas was as follows:

- 1. Opening:**
 - Cars on roads. Close up wheels.
 - Roll over crash.
 - Police headquarters.
 - Ambulance.
 - Patients in hospital (Title supered over).
 - Interviews with patients.
- 2. Physical background:**
 - crowding of cities.
 - Traffic and transport the modern problem.
 - Impact crash.
- 3. Car failures: Police laboratory investigations.**
- 4. Accident causation:**
 - A: Brief look at road engineering.
 - B: The driver:
 - Opinions.
 - Lack of self regard, no care.
 - Driver training. Advanced training.
 - Pressures on the driver.
 - The car as an extension of man.
 - The psychology of the driver
 - a: Hypnotism sequence.
 - b: Comments from psychologists.

C: The car as a factor:
The modern car.
Crash tests on circuit and in lab.
The car of the future.
The world of the future.

5. Cars in wreckers yard. Script narrative ends by emphasizing the need for concern *now*.

Certain things turned out to be impossible or impractical. I'd written a sequence involving hypnosis.* A driver would state what kind of a driver he considered himself to be, and would then enact a driving situation under hypnosis. I expected that many drivers would state that they were lambs but would reveal aggressive driving tendencies. Unfortunately, the doctor withdrew at the last moment and the sequence had to be cancelled. On consideration it was probably for the best. Other sequences had been written in simply because they gave interesting visual sections: the work in the police research laboratory was one instance, and a jazzed up sex car sequence was another.

I was fairly pleased with the outline. It gave one a guide and I knew that, as always, the footage would suggest new patterns and variations.

In practice I was only worried about one small item. After the roll-over crash which started the film, I had intended cutting to police headquarters reporting the crash. This was clearly a fake sequence and I didn't like it. The ambulance racing to the hospital was also fake in so far as it was supposed to suggest a connection with the roll-over crash but I felt much less disturbed about it. In the end I shot the police scene but didn't even use it in the rough cut.

After the script was approved I made the mistake of doing some extra research. Someone had mentioned a bright road and a safety engineer who lived in Haifa; after three hours with him it was clear I had to say more about the state of road engineering as it was a major cause of accidents. We decided the way to do this was to shoot a couple of black spots during rush hour, and then analyse them for faults with the aid of studio diagrams.

Shooting

I calculated five days shooting and a couple of days reshooting. I'd thoroughly researched the shooting areas and knew fairly precisely how I wanted a given situation shot. Early in the research I'd gone to the tallest building in Tel Aviv. I found I could get perfect top traffic shots for the end of the film. I also found that I could move in on a slow zoom to a wreckers yard which lay just off the main road. It would then be simple to cut from the zoom to close-up of the wrecks which I'd also scouted.

For more intricate shots I gave my cameraman diagrams of the situation and how I thought they ought to be covered. He in turn made occasional suggestions. Although we worked hard to give the editor possibilities for

* This idea was borrowed from a programme on Thames Television. I hadn't seen the Thames show but I'd read the script and it seemed a rather interesting study if it could be pulled off.

smooth and logical cuts within sequences, we weren't bothered over much about transitions between sequences themselves: The thread was to be maintained by verbal transitions so that this aspect of editing, normally very important, was not vital.

For the most part, we shot with an Arriflex BL. Because of the heavy zoom lens it tended to be a bit unwieldy in hand-held shooting, certainly a little more awkward than the Eclair. My cameramen, however, swore by it and the results were rather good. Occasionally, we had to supplement the BL with a Bolex when some very fast non-sync shooting was involved. This worried me a great deal because the lenses of the Bolex are poorer than on an Arriflex zoom. In editing I tried to avoid using the Bolex material. Human problems arose at the start. We arrived at the hospital for the first day's filming only to find the mother of the injured child had changed her mind. I spoke to her alone in one of the corridors. I assured her we would shoot from a distance so as not to disturb the boy, and that only myself and the cameraman would be around. This meant shooting without lights but I reckoned we could just do it on double X and that what we lost on quality would be made up for by the subject. After twenty minutes the mother agreed. Ten minutes later, an eloquent and intelligent patient, who had described the occurrence of his accident in great detail a few days ago, refused to talk. His lawyer had warned him it might prejudice his court action against another driver. I telephoned the lawyer long distance and promised to send a transcript of the interview for his approval.

Two technical problems arose during shooting. Both concerned filming in and around moving cars. The script called for the shooting of a driving lesson in which we'd see both pupil and teacher in action. I hadn't realized that we'd be shooting in a truck with a small driving cabin. This made it quite hard to position the rather bulky Arriflex. We shot quite a lot inside the car but I still wasn't happy. My cameraman resolved part of the difficulty by shooting sitting on the bonnet and by wedging himself into the open driver's door while he shot inside.

The other occurred in a section in which three or four drivers who'd been involved in accidents were heard laying the blame on somebody else. Their comments were recorded wild and I intended laying them in over four very low angle shots of the front of a sports car speeding down a road. I thought this could be shot from the front seat of a Triumph Spitfire, but again there was no room for the camera. Instead we lowered the roof, the cameraman climbed on the back and perched himself on the boot. I hung on to his legs as anchorage while the car shot along at fifty miles an hour. I could envisage the headlines '... cameraman killed in car accident while filming for car safety.' The shots were tremendous, giving a feeling of speed and movement. We didn't shoot from a properly equipped car because of the pressure of time, money and resources.

Editing

I had an excellent editor, Larry Solomon. Larry had done a lot of work in

New York for National Educational Television, and had received an Academy Award nomination. I knew he would add ideas during the cutting sessions.

The six thousand feet of original footage had been supplemented by three thousand feet of stock footage which consisted of car crashes or elaborate car tests. We were lucky in obtaining shots of the specially designed New York safety car and the controversial air-bag shock absorber. I'd also ordered about four hundred feet of film from Visnews, a British film agency. The Visnews footage consisted of special shots that I'd written into the script and which I could only obtain from a film library. These were sequences such as racing cars at Brands Hatch, a French motor show, and Ralph Nader testifying against General Motors. The Agency and stock footage came to us as positive, which meant that we had to have a further negative made which could be used in the final negative cut while the positive original could be cut into the work print. In practice the editing started while shooting was still going on. We'd review the rushes on a Steinbeck viewer which has a fast forward and rewind movement, but Larry would edit on a Moviola and moviscop viewer. All he had from me, at that stage, was the original script and a series of notes on connections, links, and approximate timings. Once shooting was over I worked alongside him. When we reviewed the rushes, certain scenes just didn't work, or watered down the central idea. We dropped the police control room at the start and at least half the interviews. I wanted Nader at the Senate hearings and to introduce the story of his battle for improved car safety, but Larry pointed out that Nader was unknown in Israel. We therefore introduced the subject of car safety much more dramatically, by using aerial views of the Fiat testing grounds. While Larry had leaway in his cutting of general shots of cars and races, the interviews had to be cut on a specific word. I had transcripts made of all the interviews and underlined with a pencil the parts I wanted to use. The comments were then either used synced, or floated over general pictures. Normally, we could use whole sentences or whole paragraphs from an interview, but the language of one woman hospital patient was full of curses against the driver who'd broken her leg. We cut almost every other word from her accident description and used her voice over action.

Before starting editing Larry and I discussed some of the film's problems. There were almost too many ideas in the film. In order for the audience to grasp them we would have to keep a very tight hold on the structure. We cut out the superfluous and tried to aim for cleanliness, speed and a sense of rhythm in the editing. Discussion continued right through the editing. We would juggle sequences, debate structural alterations and generally try to find ways to improve the film.

In the first draft script I had a 'look at the sufferer' sequence. It started by a look at accident patients in hospital and then 'progressed' to a view of the six year old boy just having recovered consciousness. The sequence then concluded by hearing from a father whose son had died in an accident.

When we discussed the sequence Larry suggested that emotionally we were wasting the father in this spot. We decided to put the father at the end of a sequence on speed and sex. The sequence as it appeared in the draft script was as follows:

1. Sexy girls are seen lying on sports cars at a trade exhibition.
2. Drivers talk about their love of speed while we see cars racing round the Brands Hatch circuit.
3. A couple of well known psychologists talk about speed and aggression. After Larry's comments we decided to drop the psychological analysis which slowed down the film and to add three new sets of shots. The recut sequence then went:

1. Cars at trade exhibition.
2. Racing cars on circuit.
3. Roll over crash at high speed . . . dissolve to . . .
4. Memorial stone to dead boy . . . dissolve to . . .
5. Father talking about the crash and the effect of the death on the family. The first had been too intellectual. The second one struck like a bomb, was visually effective, and made you feel something in your stomach about the price being paid for aggression and speed.

Sometimes, it wasn't so much a matter of arranging sequences but of arguing about the split timing of a series of shots. This happened at the beginning of the film where we had a montage of cars speeding by before cutting to a crash. I felt the sequence had been cut too long although it was only fifteen seconds. Recut to twelve seconds, was also too long for me, but cutting about six frames out of each of four shots, saved another second and the montage began to work.

Our rough cut version ran thirty-seven minutes and we spent a couple of days cutting it down to the required half an hour. So other things went – a lot of the analysis of engineering faults and some more interviews. We then timed each sequence so that my rough outline commentary could be written in detail to fit each section.

We sent the film for a negative cut and had a flash reversal print made against which we could lay in sound effects. Many had been recorded on location but many had to be made. These included everything from 'room atmosphere' to 'factory' and 'helicopter noises'. There are memories of one terrible morning surrounded by traffic noises, crashes, sirens and whistles played over and over again.

While Larry was laying the tracks I sat in the next room writing sections of a commentary that was simple and lucid, that would make a point, present a problem, and then let the visuals take over.

As the opening was so important I tried out two or three versions, but finally hit on one which got immediately to the heart of the matter. The opening commentary came in over the ambulance racing to the hospital and finished as the viewer was taken down a hospital ward and shown a waiting bed. The commentary went:

'Last year 408 people died on our roads. Another fifteen thousand were

seriously injured. The situation is reaching epidemic proportions with casualties far greater than from border or terrorist raids. But do we really care . . .'

The title then came in over the waiting bed. We cut to patients talking about their accidents and the film was on its way.

Generally, I like to work by recording the commentary directly against the picture. For various reasons this couldn't be done here. We recorded the commentary section by section against a stop watch and then laid the commentary track in against the picture. Where the timing had gone astray we simply cut out a superfluous word here and there from the magnetic tape, or eliminated a breath pause.

Finally, we had four tracks and numerous loops of traffic noises. Larry went through them on a footage counter to draw up the mixing chart. This chart is a guide for the sound mixer and tells him both when to bring in the various tracks, and also when to adjust the volume of one track against another. When we arrived at the sound studios, the footage counter was out of order and the tracks had to be mixed visually against the picture, a long laborious process, instead of simply following the footage counter guide. It also meant we had to make various pre-mixes instead of one pre-mix and one final mix.

Instead of an optical sound track which would run alongside the film, I had decided because of time pressures to broadcast double system with the print on one projector and the magnetic sound locked on another. Although I was afraid of scratching the print I checked it on a viewer only to find that the closing shot, a picture of a crashed car whose bumper bore a sticker reading 'It pays to be courteous . . .' had been cut in upside down and, therefore, printed back to front. After hectic calls to the labs and some promises the shot was cut in and the picture ready about an hour before broadcast.

Postscript

I was fairly pleased with the result but felt I'd learnt a few lessons:

I had made a mistake in not insisting on one cameraman all the way through. When cameramen know each other's work very thoroughly this doesn't matter much, but having been forced to use four different cameramen I felt there were too many variations in camera style.

The film could have done with more controversy, more bite, more challenges between individuals and against institutions. I had tried to get people to be outspoken, to challenge accepted theories, but they had either been too afraid or had sought refuge in platitudes.

I tried too broad a sweep and lost a certain amount of structural unity. Possibly, I would have done better had I concentrated solely on the driver and not bothered with road engineering or the problem of building the safer car. The film would have been simpler. However, I think I felt a certain satisfaction in having raised issues that were normally ignored – their impact stemming from ordinary people's experiences.

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Book Reviews

Horizons West. Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: studies of Authorship within the Western **Jim Kitses**

Cinema One series, Thames & Hudson, Paperback, 158

As Jim Kitses rightly points out, work on this subject and these directors is woeful, inadequate, or non-existent. Here we have one of the few books in English that can offer insight to the specialist. (The itemization of the missing bits of *Major Dundee* is particularly valuable here). It provides the groundwork for a body of scholarship and shows the educationalist a vast untapped field for study, as well as suggesting ways in which such study could be carried out. Whatever objections there may be to some of Kitses's points and opinions, he has written a vigorous, well-tuned book which never gets trapped in a maze of academic boredom. But if anybody *seriously* wants to write about authorship and genre, the book has still to be written.

In many respects, this is an irritating book because Jim Kitses seems split between two approaches; the result is an unsatisfactory fusion. The overall concept – 'authorship and genre' – appears no more than pedantic pussy-footing, a fear that three studies of 'action' directors is not erudite, dignified responsible, academically valid. He has an opening chapter introducing us to the genre; a potted history of its roots and development; a short list of its variety

and preoccupations – leading us to expect that the book, as a whole, will indeed explore 'authorship and genre', a fascinating and necessary area of study. But in the end, Kitses uses it as an academic smokescreen, a respectable peg on which to hang his three monographs. The chain of collaborative responsibility that is the American cinema is an area well worth investigating, and, theoretically, is within Jim Kitses's brief. The work of Borden Chase, Philip Yordan, Dudley Nichols in relation to Mann's work, and their scripts for other directors (notably Nicholas/Ford); the pre-Boetticher Scott/Brown films; the solo Burt Kennedy films; the work of Elmore Leonard; the original novel *Yellowleg*, from which *Deadly Companions* was taken; the contribution of N. B. Stone Jr. to *Guns in the Afternoon*/*Ride the High Country* and Richard Wilson's *Trouble Shooter*/*Man with a Gun* – all these and a myriad of inter-connecting areas of shared responsibility and reference seem to be the places to determine authorship within the genre. Although Jim Kitses is well aware of the questions, only with Borden Chase does he investigate fully. If directors like these are being dealt with, other westerns, rival or complementary themes, frameworks, etc.

must be discussed. However much one may go along with Jim Kitses in feeling that the men he writes about 'can be said to have found *their* essence within the genre', as opposed to Bazin's point that Mann and Boetticher 'returned to the essence of the genre', the real point remains that they and their colleagues and rivals have helped cement our interest in it. Without work of this quality, westerns indeed would be esoteric academicism.

Jim Kitses has drawn heavily on his work in the BFI Education Department and makes it clear that he sees himself as an educationalist. ('The call has echoed out across the lonely landscape of critical endeavour: what *is* the western?' he says, while giving us 21 pages of his interpretation – pages that every cinéaste surely worked out long ago). In so far as it is a study of authorship within the western, the book is primarily aimed at those who might still turn up their noses at gunsmoke and thundering herds.

Jim Kitses clearly responds to Mann's films best and does a fine job making sense out of his career. He copes less well with Boetticher who needs empathy more than response. As Peckinpah is still very much at the start of his career, one is more likely to have bones to pick about Kitses's interpretation and enthusiasm. Significantly, Peckinpah has 22 pages of the book, Boetticher 42 and Mann 52 (excluding filmographies). The Peckinpah is very much up to date: Jim Kitses has moved fast to embrace *The Wild Bunch* so comprehensively, but it is a mark of his sense of values, that the new Boetticher film is treated as a sort of addendum and is not incorporated into the body of the piece.

Every writer prefers, and Jim Kitses is at his best on Mann; he feels Peckinpah to be a Titan but he does not explain

why so well. However sympathetic he is to Boetticher, he seems to have missed out on many of this artist's virtues and value; the very style of his writing is at variance with his subject. Boetticher and Peckinpah are really the only two major working westerners at this time, and value judgements, which Jim Kitses himself demands we make, are most apposite here. When the difference in their work is evidently one of scale, the critic needs to be aware that judgement and self-control are part of art, indulgence is not. However impressive Peckinpah appears in his desperate charge towards 'freedom' he retains many defects and is still only a challenger for a place in the front rank.

Jim Kitses tells us what his trio is saying but seldom tries to capture in words how they say or show it. Since each director possesses a unique awareness of 'pictorialization' (Mann's word) making for the creation of films in the total sense, this seems a perverse lack on Kitses's part.

Christopher Wicking

Mamoulian

Tom Milne

Thames and Hudson-BFI, Cinema One no. 13, 1981.

The career of Rouben Mamoulian is certainly unusual: only sixteen completed films over a period of thirty years, never more than one a year, all (at least initially) major projects, such widely disparate subjects that recollection can never confuse one with another. For forty years his reputation has remained considerable, despite minor fluctuations, with critics of every persuasion: a reputation that was acquired on Broadway before he ever set foot inside a film studio.

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Tom Milne comes near to disarming the critic at the outset, by declaring that he has not come to praise him for innovation (usually considered Mamoulian's salient virtue, not least by the director himself) nor for the early films (until *Becky Sharp*) at the expense of the later ones. Instead, he pronounces himself a dissident and defends *High, Wide and Handsome* and *The Mark of Zorro*. He reserves his most detailed admiration for *Love Me Tonight*, which he sees as 'head-and-shoulders above any other musical for years – perhaps until Minnelli, and ends with the judgement that *Silk Stockings* is one of the cinema's greatest musicals.

Certainly Tom Milne has some interesting things to say. Both *The Gay Desperado* and *Applause* sound much better in his description than memory recalls them. He presents a convincing argument about the specific sexuality of *Dr. Jekyll*, although he fails to acknowledge how appropriate it is that both Jekyll and his fiancée seem colourless when the story demands that their life should seem fragile in contrast with the baser half of human nature (Hyde) and also with the lower half of society (Miriam Hopkins). He gives March himself little credit for his performance, so different from other screen Hydes in being oafish rather than merely sinister, thus presenting a dichotomy between nobility and brutishness, confirmed by Mamoulian's own reference to the conflict between Nature and Civilization. Milne is also less than fair to Paul Lukas in *City Streets* ('embarrassingly inadequate'), and his objection to contemporary slang pronounced with a European accent is flimsy: did Al Capone speak perfect American? Lukas's genteel appearance is surely intriguing rather than inappropriate; some point may even have been

intended by it, though this may be an anachronism, and Lukas was, after all, under contract to Paramount. But it is right to object to the classification of the *City Streets* as simply a gangster film; it differs from the famous trio of *Scarface*, *Little Caesar* and *Public Enemy* both because the gang boss is not the protagonist and because the film has no sociological or hortatory pretensions. It is easy to forget that all the deaths take place off screen, so strongly are they suggested by the highly-wrought style. One of the faults of Milne's book is that the obligation to give an account of a film's plot makes it difficult to distinguish between what is included for the sake of necessary information and what is being held up for the reader's admiration. *Queen Christina*, for example, is a film that it is impossible even to like unless you admire Garbo. Milne does, and this chapter is mere hyperbole to the unconverted. Discussion in these terms is not meaningless; to some extent indeed it is inevitable, but the vocabulary of approbation is a limited one, and the means of conveying verbally effects that are primarily visual soon become threadbare or repetitious. Too often the balance between description and evaluation is lost. The few analogies he makes are unfortunate: there are much better ways of expressing deep feelings about the lyrical atmosphere of *Summer Holiday* than by recourse to an inappropriate quotation from 'Kubla Khan,' and 'The Hollow Men' has really nothing whatever to do with the convent nuns in *Applause*. The frequent fault of overquoting dialogue which is not very remarkable in itself suggests an author anxious to provide proof rather than illustration. Of all Mamoulian's films, *Love Me Tonight* has had the most praise lavished

on it in recent years, and it is a pity that Milne follows what now seems to be the fashion in extolling the film at the expense of Lubitsch. 'The Lubitsch touch' refers to an epigrammatic eloquence, which Mamoulian rarely attained, and a wit, for either comic or serious purpose, where Mamoulian seems too often merely frivolous or distastefully arch. The film is in many incidentals well-contrived, but it is no more a recommendation that it should be 'almost one long, unbroken production number' than that *Parapluies de Cherbourg* should contain no spoken dialogue. Some effect of a production number lies in contrast with the texture of the surrounding narrative. The poles of Mamoulian's achievement Milne defines as stylization and movement. But the former is always to be approached with caution in the cinema, the most verisimilitudinous of art-forms. Would Milne approve, for instance, of the repulsive stylization, of both acting and decor, in Lubitsch's early silent films? Movement seems a quality reserved for his musicals and comedies, but one that is curiously absent from his serious films. His two excursions into the action film, *The Mark of Zorro* and *Blood and Sand*, both with the same star and for the same studio, are, in spite of Milne's claims, unremarkable in comparison with the work of Fox's other prestige directors of the same period, Henry King or Hathaway, and their second units. The comparison made with the silent version of *Zorro* to Fred Niblo (who strangely enough, made both that, and the original version of *Blood and Sand*) is unfavourable, but Milne underestimates the importance of vivacity in the leading man in a swashbuckler, where the action is felt as an extension of his temperament, which should therefore

be ebullient like Fairbanks's and not uncertain like Power's. Valentino was far preferable in *Blood and Sand*, and Hayworth is a disastrously vapid Dona Sol in comparison with Nita Naldi. It is curious that the earlier film should succeed in being far more poignant than the remake. In *Queen Christina*, the apparently deliberate stasis of the court scenes ultimately pervades the whole film, since these are inadequately contrasted with any livelier movement elsewhere.

It cannot be denied that Mamoulian is prodigal of ideas, but many of these are better in conception than in execution. The celebrated example of the emphasis on red at the premature end of the Duchess of Richmond's ball in *Becky Sharp* has little force, even after allowance has been made for the degeneration of the prints now available. Though many of the ideas are visual, these relate to colour and decor more than to compositions or movement within the frame. They are of the theatre rather than of the cinema.

There are, inevitably, exceptions to this generalization. *Rings on Her Fingers* is admirably visualized and its action unflaggingly sustained. Milne, like everyone else, does it scant justice even while using such descriptions as 'frequently elegant and amusing' and (of script and performance) 'unusually good', concluding that it is 'of only marginal interest in his work'. It is only too easy to understand why Mamoulian himself regards it as the least satisfying of his films; no director today likes to own his most impersonal work.

Praise is due to Tom Milne for resisting the temptation to accept Mamoulian's own valuations, but it is curious that he omits any mention of his claim to have invented the zoom, particularly as this

occurs in the opening sequence which he admires so much of *Love Me Tonight*. Perhaps, he knows that the claim will not hold water: even a feeble film like *Beau Ideal*, made the year before, has a dramatic moment, stressed with exactly the right emphasis by a zoom. Yet Mamoulian's use of it is not for any emphasis and this is interesting in itself. On matters of fact, the book is sound enough, but could profitably have been more inclusive. One is grateful for the account of *We Live Again*, unavailable in this country for many years, but it would have been instructive to know how the treatment differs from that in the two other Hollywood versions of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, made only shortly before. Although dates of shooting are included, no attempt is made to estimate how much of his work remains in *Laura*. The changes to *Gone to Earth*, which Mamoulian undertook at Selznick's request, are made to sound like minor amendments only; in fact, the version released in the U.S.A. (under the title *The Wild Heart*) was some 28 minutes shorter than the original. The filmography is complete, though with little extension of the conventional credits, and falls far short of Parisian standards. The biggest disappointment, however, is the lack of information about Mamoulian's stage work, except for the famous *Symphony of Noises in Porgy and Bess*. There is a full list of his productions, but this is available elsewhere, and one would have welcomed their casts at least, even if no detailed description were possible of their staging. The book's introduction serves as an apologia for his subject, depicted, in a knowing way as a creative force thwarted by a nebulous Hollywood Establishment. One point that Milne

does not mention is that it was not until his fourth film that he was given a subject taken directly or indirectly from the stage – which in an industry turning desperately to the theatre for actors, directors and plays, on the coming of sound, is odd and greatly to Mamoulian's advantage. One wonders what he would have made of the plays that were filmed during those first years – for example, *The Swan* with its Ruritanian setting or *As You Desire Me* with Garbo.

PHILIP JOHNS is a student of English and American Cinema.

Pasolini on Pasolini interviews with Oswald Stack

Thames & Hudson, London, 15s.
paperback, 30s. cloth.

The frontispiece illustration indicates Pasolini's concern with 'paintings come to life', though it also suggests his strained approach to film. His opposition to naturalism, his dislike of 'the new English Cinema', which seems to him an inferior version of neo-realism, the influence of Dreyer, Chaplin, and Mizoguchi, and his unsatisfactory excursions into semiology are all here. The feigned modesty is well captured in translation. To bring it up to date, an Appendix dealing with *Teorema* is included.

After regretting the shortage of English Language material on Pasolini, it seems a pity that the bibliography is not more complete: an article from *Sight and Sound* (Spring '69), one from *Screen No. 3*, and another by an editor of this journal in *Studio International* (March '69) are omitted, presumably through carelessness.

Tom Gale

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Film Review

Maurice Speed

W. H. Allen 30s.

In the days before westerns, other than Ford's, were fashionable, it seems only two people in Britain loved and championed them – Dilys Powell (so long as the horses did not get hurt) and the redoubtable F. Maurice Speed. His long-lamented *Western Film Annual* was an amazing volume, aimed primarily at the Christmas shopping market, to serve as a present for film fans, kids, 'the general public'. The annual's champ contributor was William K. Everson, whose own book, *The Western*, is in many places a reworking of material first published by Speed. In itself, the annual sprang out of a feature on westerns in Speed's other yearly volume, *Film Review*, which is still going strong after 25 years and a change of publisher. Buying this is a sort of annual ritual for those of us who are fans at heart, not academicians. A volume like *Film Review* is 'useful' and 'important' in many respects, but not as scholarship. We buy it not for the

present, but for the future, to see what the past was like. To me, it's a Yearly Film Bulletin against which the Monthly variety can't compete.

This year you can read Mr. Everson on gangster films (plus what reads very much like an [uncredited] F. Maurice Speed sermon tacked on the end, as if part of the article); Allen Eyles (whose name is spelled wrong twice) with an engaging and affectionate piece on old films on TV; Oswald Blakeston 'remembering' Erich von Stroheim; Ernest Betts with an infuriating piece about 'reviewers'; plus – as the ads say – all the usual features, a review of the year in pictures with a list (including cast, director, producer) of every film released in the period under scrutiny. The whole thing is much more interesting than many people would allow, and has an intelligence and affection for films that is quite 'unnecessary', but this is why it has succeeded for so long.

CHRISTOPHER WICKING is a screen writer whose work includes *Screen and Screen Again* and *Travelling People*.

SELECT BOOK LIST ON THEORY OF FILM

Reading List compiled by
GILLIAN HARTNOLL
Librarian, British Film
Institute

ARNHEIM, Rudolf

Film as Art. Faber, 1958.

Collection of writings first published in the thirties. Arnheim describes his object as being 'to show in detail how the very properties that make photography and film fall short of perfect reproduction can act as the necessary moulds of an artistic medium'.

DURGNAT, Raymond

Films and Feelings. Faber, 1967.

Although it ranges over a number of subjects, there is a substantial section on the subject of style in the cinema, and this concern also underlies the rest of the book.

EISENSTEIN, Sergei

Film Form: translated and edited by Jay Leyda. Dennis Dobson, 1951.

Film Form and *Film Sense* (which seems to be temporarily out of print) were first published in English in the forties, but even before then Eisenstein's theories, especially on the paramount importance of montage, had an enormous influence on critical thinking.

EISENSTEIN, Sergei

Film Essays: edited by Jay Leyda.

Dennis Dobson, 1968.

A collection of pieces ranging from general film theory to an appreciation of John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*.

GESSNER, Robert

The Moving Image: a Guide to Cinematic Literacy. New York, E. P. Dutton, 1968.

Uses diagrams and a large number of script extracts to illustrate topics such as 'conflict and character' and 'scene climax'. Many reviewers consider it a major work, but some find it pretentious.

JACOBS, Lewis, editor

Introduction to the Art of the Movies: an Anthology of Ideas on the Nature of Movie Art. New York, Noonday Press, 1960.

Particularly useful because practically all the items were originally published in journals. Grouped in decades they provide a conspectus of critical thought from 1910 to 1960.

KRACAUER, Siegfried

Nature of Film: the Redemption of Physical Reality. Dennis Dobson, 1961.

Another very influential book.

Kracauer attempts to identify the essential qualities of cinema and concludes that it is at its best in the exploration of physical reality.

LAWSON, John Howard

Film the Creative Process:

the Search for an Audio-Visual Language Structure. New York, Hill & Wang, 1964.

Examines world cinema from a viewpoint of sympathy with the Eisenstein/Pudovkin critical approach.

MacCANN, Richard Dyer,
editor

Film: a Montage of Theories.

New York, E. P. Dutton, 1966.

Probably the most interesting of the anthologies, taking material equally from books and periodicals and including items by virtually all the main film theorists.

PUDOVKIN, Vsevolod

Film Technique and Film

Acting: translated and edited by Ivor Montagu. Vision Press, 1953.

Another very influential Russian critic and film maker. He makes his position clear in the first sentence of the introduction 'The foundation of film art is editing'.

TALBOT, Daniel, editor

Film: an Anthology. Berkeley, California University Press, 1966.

Provides a useful introduction to critical writing with examples (mostly from books) from many leading writers on the cinema.

Hardback edition containing more items was published in 1959.

TYLER, Parker

The Three Faces of Film: the Art, the Dream, the Cult. Rev. ed., Thomas Yoseloff, 1967.

A collection of previously published periodical articles, together with a few original pieces. Parker Tyler's appreciation of Hollywood – Magic and Myth of the Movies – is being republished soon, no doubt at Myra Breckenridge's request.

WOLLEN, Peter

Signs and Meaning in the Cinema. Thames and Hudson, 1969. (Cinema One, no. 9.)

A reappraisal of Eisenstein's theories and the 'auteur' school of criticism, together with a proposed third theoretical approach based on the science of semiology.